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THE BLUE DUCHESS

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THE BLUE DUCHESS

by

PAUL BOURGET

Translated by ERNEST TRISTAN

NEW YORK: BRENTANO'S

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PREFACE

PAUL BOURGET was born in the cathedral city of Amiens about fifty years ago, but there are a number of other interesting things to say about him. Like so many famous authors, he began, in 1873, with verse. Probably the verse did not bring him the instant fame that we all desire with our first book, for he soon turned to prose, which of course as Saltus has hinted, is more difficult. Again, it is probable that verse and prose are not really so very far apart, but are related, as an angel is related to a saint, or a lovely sister to her handsome but very masculine brother. Essays followed Bourget's lyrics, then a triumphal procession of novels and travels, till, in 1904, he became a poet again by wearing the blue and gold costume of the French Academy.

For about ten years now the writings of Paul Bourget have had great success in London's capitol, Mayfair, among a certain set or circle of ladies whose minds are as carefully tended as are their beautiful bodies. They have read him, even as they have read Anatole France and Marcel Prevost, because of notes of distinction in the writings, the lack of discord, the evidences of balanced, graceful,

well-valeted life. Bourget belongs to the group of writers who are sometimes termed Salon-writers. I imagine it is a German classification; it brings before the vision one writing with a gold pen using a silver standish upon a table of sycamore. Perhaps if we say in English "the kid-glove school" the phrase will describe, if it does not please. This note of refinement in style, distinction in utterance, is certainly represented best in France by Bourget, in Italy by D'Annunzio, in Holland by Couperus, in America by Saltus. Of course other countries have claims too. There has been very little written about Bourget in English, not because he writes French, but because he writes. In a *conte* charmingly named *A Bouquet of Illusions* Bourget himself is one of the characters, the protagonist part in fact. The *conte* is written by Saltus and is worthy of both novelists

G. F. MONKSHOOD.

LONDON,
1908.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

NOT long ago, I assisted at the unexpected end of an adventure, which, after it had just missed being a tragedy, concluded in an almost comic fashion. Although I was only cast for a very small part, as a simple spectator, my heart was too much mixed up in it for me to-day not to feel in similar circumstances the bitter sensation of the irony of things, which may be either cruel or beneficial. It is the chill of the steel which cuts you, though it cures you too. It has occurred to me to make the adventure into a story. Obviously it would be more reasonable to go on with one of my unfinished pictures, "The Pardon of Psyche," for instance, which has been standing on the easel for years, or one of those inanimate objects: old furniture, silver, and books, which will comprise the series called "Humble Friends."

"A painter," my master, Miraut, used to say, "should only think brush in hand." It is my opinion, from numerous illustrious examples including Miraut himself, that he should not think at all. But I know only too well, I am but half a painter, an artist in intention rather than in temperament, the outline of a Fromentin of

the twelfth rank. That is a singular feeling of sadness too : the feeling that one is but an inferior double of another, a small and poor proof of a block already printed, a sample of humanity in the likeness of a model who has already lived, and in whose destiny it is possible to read beforehand one's own destiny ! But not all one's own destiny ! For I am only too well aware that I suffer from the same failings as Fromentin without possessing his brilliance. But the brush was not sufficient for this complex and elaborate master. He wanted, with the nervous hand which transmitted colours to canvas, to put ink upon paper, and what was the result ? We other painters said his painting was too literary, and literary men said his literature was too technical, too pictorial, and not intellectual enough.

In my own case at each exhibition of my work for years past my fellow-painters' reserve, and their praise particularly, have signified to me that I lack a real artist's original and visionary nature. But I do not require my fellow-artists' judgment ; what does my own conscience say ? If I really expressed myself with my brush alone, should I have brought back from Spain, Morocco, Italy and Egypt as many pages of notes as sketches ? I have for fifteen years, wandered between numberless contradictory forms of art and mind. I have wandered from country to country seeking the sun and health ; from museum to museum seeking æsthetic revelations, and later from art school to art school seeking an artist's creed, and from

dream to dream in search of a love. My affairs of the heart have all been incipient and abortive for the same reason as my affairs of the mind : my irremediable incapacity to make up my mind and stand firm, in which to-day I recognize the strange originality of my character.

When we see with what infrangible conditions nature surrounds us, is it not best to accept them ? At least, I have made up my mind upon an essential point, my work. That is something. I have promised myself to fret no more over vain ambitions. I will be a mediocre painter ; that is all. In that case why should I deny myself the pleasure of writing, a thing which formerly discipline forbade ? As it is certain that the name of M. Vincent la Croix will never shine in the sky of glory with the names of Gustave Moreau, of Puvis de Chavannes, and of Burne-Jones, why should M. Vincent la Croix deprive himself of this compensation : wasting his time after his own fashion, like the rich amateur, the dilettante and the critic he is ? That is the reason why, when about to live over again in thought the episodes of a real little romance, into which chance introduced me, I have prepared paper, a pen, and ink. Here is a fresh proof that I shall always lack spontaneous and gushing geniality ; I have gone out of my way to explain my motives at the beginning of this story, instead of starting it simply and boldly. I can see its most minute details before me, so what need have I of excusing in my own eyes a work which tempts me ? I shall be at liberty to destroy

it if I am too ashamed of it when it is finished. Many a time have I painted out a canvas which I considered bad! This time two logs in the fireplace and a match will suffice. That is one of the unspeakable superiorities of literature over painting.

CHAPTER I

THE reason I can clearly recollect the exact date of the beginning of the adventure I am about to relate, is that it was my thirty-sixth birthday. That is twenty-nine months ago. That anniversary found me more melancholy than usual. The reason of it was still the same: the feeling that my faculties were at the same time unemployed and limited, and that the boundary of my talent was continually being reached. The pretext? I smile at the pretext. But what imaginative man has not had in his youth childish and heroic determinations? What artist has not fixed beforehand the stages in his glorious career, comparing himself to some illustrious person? Caesar, who was as good as most people, said: "At my age Alexander had conquered the world." That is an heroic cry when the pride of a still unknown power palpitates in it, but it is harrowing when the conviction of definitive impuissance utters this useless sigh towards triumph. I am not Caesar, but all my diaries—and I have many—abound in dates which were rendezvous given by me to Fame, but which she failed to keep.

On my thirty-seventh birthday I had, as my

custom was, been looking through my papers and reflecting that I was still as little known to fame as I had been in my youth, still as lacking in glorious works, great actions, and grand passions, and my hope was gradually departing. That morning, too, an agency to which I was foolish enough to subscribe, had sent me two newspaper cuttings mentioning my name and making unfriendly comments upon my work. A fresh wave of discouragement swept over me, paralyzing the creative energy of the soul, and clearly demonstrating to me my own shortcomings. My communion with my thoughts on that darkening autumn afternoon frightened me, and I took refuge in a means of distraction which was usually successful, a visit to the School of Arms in the Rue Boissy d'Anglais. There I overcame my nerves by a series of exercises performed with all the vigour of which I was capable. A cold bath and a rub down followed by dinner in congenial company and a rubber used to pass the evening. Towards eleven o'clock I could return home without much risk of insomnia. I had carried out the first part of this programme on the first evening of my thirty-seventh year and should have completed it if I had not, on entering the dining-room of my club, met perhaps the oldest of my Parisian comrades, an old schoolfellow too, the celebrated novelist and dramatic author, Jacques Molan.

"Will you come and dine?" he asked me. "I have a table, do dine with me."

Under any other circumstances, in spite of our long friendship, I should have excused myself. Few personalities weary me so quickly as Jacques. He has combined with faults I detest the quality most lacking in me : the power to impose himself, the audacity of mind, the productive virility, and the self-confidence without which a man is not a great artist. Do the great virtues of genius of necessity bring with them an abuse of the " I," of which this writer was an extraordinary example ?

The two other men of letters I knew best, Julien Dorsenne and Claude Larcher, were most certainly not tainted with egotism. They were modest violets, holy and timid violets, small and humble in the grass by the side of Jacques. " His " books, " his " plays, " his " enemies, " his " plans, " his " profits, " his " mistresses, " his " health, existed for himself alone, and he talked of no one but him self. That was the reason Claude said : " How can you ever expect Molan to be sad ? Every morning he gazes at himself in the looking-glass and thinks : ' How happy I am to dress as the first author of the day ! ' " But Claude was slightly envious of Jacques, and that was one of the latter's superiorities ; through his self-conceit he was ignorant of any feeling like envy. He did not prefer himself to others, he ignored them. The explanation of this mystery was : with his almost unhealthy vanity only equalled by his insensibility, this fellow had only to sit down with paper in front of him, and beneath his pen came and went, spoke and acted, enjoyed and suffered

passionate and eloquent beings, creatures of flesh and blood full of love and hate—in a word, real men and women. A whole world was produced, so real, so intense, so amusing, or so moving in turn, that even I am filled with admiration every time I read his books. But I know it is only illusion, only magic, only a sleight-of-hand trick; I know that the spiritual father of these heroes and heroines is a perfect literary monster, with a flask of ink in the place of a heart. I am wrong. He still has there the passionate love of success. What marvellous tact, what fingering in the playing upon that surprising organ, public taste!

Jacques is the accomplished type of what we call in studio slang a "profiteur," the artist who excels in appropriating another's work, and displaying it to the best advantage! For example, at the period of his rise, Naturalism was in the ascendant. Zola's admirable *Assommoir* had just appeared, and almost immediately came the extraordinary studies of peasants and girls which revealed to the world of letters the name of the unhappy Maupassant. Jacques realized that no great success was possible in any other form of novel, and at the same time he divined that after these two masters he must not touch trivial and popular environment. The reader was satiated with that. Molan then conceived the idea, which amounted to genius, of applying to high life the results of the bitter observation and brutal realism so popular then. His four first volumes of novels and short stories were thus, the descrip-

tion being bestowed upon them on their first appearance, pomaded with Zola and perfumed with Maupassant. Epigrams are epigrams, and success is success. Molan's success was very rapid, it may be remembered.

Soon after, certain indications made him realize that the reader's taste was changing again, that it was turning in the direction of analysis and psychological study. Then he abruptly changed his methods and we had the three books which have done most for his reputation: *Martyre Intime, Cœur Crisè* and *Anciennes Amours.* In them he preserved the faults usual in imitators; long dissertations, the philosophic treatment of little love adventures, and particularly the abuse of worldly adornment. He had originated naturalism in high life. He introduced analysis of the poor, humble and middle classes. Afterwards, when virtue suddenly appeared to be the order of the day, we had from his pen the only novel of the period which rivalled in honest success, L'abbe Constantin. It was *Blanche Comme Un Lys.*

When social problems became the critic's copy, Molan once more changed his methods and wrote the novel on a working-class family called *Une Épopée de a temps,* a work of imagination in two volumes, of which 65,000 copies were sold. See the vanity of æsthetic theories! All these books were conceived with different principles of art. Through them we could follow the history of the variations of fashion. Not one of them is sincere in the real sense of the word, and all of them have

in an equal degree that colour of human truth which seems in this wayward writer an unconscious gift. The same gift he displayed, when fearing to weary his readers by an abuse of the novel, he began to write plays. He wrote *Adèle*, a great success at the Français ; *La Vaincue*, at the Odeòn was another, and the newspapers had informed me of his fresh success at the Vaudeville, with an enigmatically entitled comedy, *La Duchesse Blue*.

Now the fact that we were at school together proves that this enormous output, ten volumes of fiction, two of short stories, a collection of verses, three plays was produced in sixteen years. Jacques, too, lived while he worked like this. He had mistresses, made necessary journeys which allowed him to truthfully write in his prefaces sentences like this : " When I picked anemomes in the gardens of the Villa Pamphili ! " or like this : " I, too, offered up my prayer on the Acropolis " ; or again : " Like the bull I saw kneel down to die in the bull ring at Seville." I have quoted these phrases from memory. Besides all this, the animal looked after his relatives and his investments, and preserved his gaiety and youthful appetite. I had proof of that the evening I mechanically dined with him in spite of my secret antipathy dominated by the suggestion of vitality emanating from every one of his gestures. We were no sooner seated than he asked me—

" What wine do you prefer, champagne or Burgundy ? They are both very good here."

"I think that Eau de Vals will do for me," I replied.

"Have you not a good digestion?" he asked with a laugh; "I don't know that I have a stomach. Then I will have extra dry champagne." His egoism was of a convenient kind, as he never discussed other people's caprices, nor allowed them to discuss his. He ordered the dinner and asked me if I had seen his play at the Vaudeville, what I thought of it, and whether it was not the best thing he had done.

"You know," I replied in some embarrassment, "I hardly ever go to the theatre."

"What luck!" he went on good-humouredly. "I will take you this evening. I shall find out your first impression of it. Will you be frank with me? You will see that it is not so bitter as *Adèle*, nor quite so eloquent as *La Vaincue*. But the way to succeed is to baffle expectations; never, never repeat oneself! Those who reproached me with lack of brain and ignorance of my business, have had to acknowledge their mistake. You know me. I say out loud what I think. When I published *Tendres Nuances*, last year, you remember what I said to you: 'It is not worth the trouble of reading'; but *La Duchesse Blue* is different. The public is of the same opinion as myself."

"But where do you find your titles?" I asked.

"What!" he cried; "you, a painter, ask me that question? Don't you know Gainsborough's "Blue Boy" in the gallery of Grosvenor House in London? My play has for its heroine a woman

whom one of your colleagues, better informed than yourself in English manners, has painted in a harmony of blue tints as the Gainsborough boy. This woman, being a Duchess, has been nicknamed in her set the Little Blue Duchess, because of the portrait. With my dialogue and little Favier ! "

" Who is little Favier ? " I asked.

" What ! " he cried, " don't you know little Favier ? You pretend to live in Paris ! Not that I blame you for not frequenting the theatres. Seeing the kind of plays usually put on, I think it was high time they gave us young ones a chance."

" That does not tell me about little Favier," I insisted.

" Well ! Camille Favier is the Blue Duchess. She acts with talent, fantasy and grace ! I discovered her. A year ago she was at the Conservatoire. I saw her there and recognized her talent, and when I sent my play to the Vaudeville, I told them I wanted her to take the part. They engaged her, and now she is famous. My luck is contagious. But you must do her portrait for me as she is in the play, a symphony in blue major ! It will be a fine subject for you for the next Salon. I repeat I am very lucky. Then what a head she has for you : twenty-two years old, a complexion like a tea-rose, a mouth sad in repose and tender when smiling, blue eyes to complete the symphony, pale, pale, pale blue with a black point in the middle, which sometimes increases in size ; her hair is the colour of oriental tobacco, and she is slender, supple and young. She lives with her mother in a

third floor in the Rue de la Barcuellère, in your neighbourhood. That detail is good as a human document. People talk of the theatre's corruption : nine hundred francs rent, one servant, and an outlook on a convent garden ! She believes in her art, and in authors ! She believes too much in them."

He said these words with a smile, the meaning of which was unmistakable. His remarks had been accompanied by an insolent and sensual look, gleaming and self-satisfied. I had no doubt as to the feeling the pretty actress inspired in him. He told me about these private matters in a very loud voice, with that apparent indiscretion which implies thoughtlessness and so well conceals design. But this sort of gossip always has a prudent limit. Besides, the diners at the next table were three retired generals, to interrupt whose conversation then gun-shot would have been required. The noises made by the thirty or forty persons dining were sufficient to drown even Jacques' most distinct phrases. So there was really no reason for my companion to speak in low tones, as I did in questioning him. But what a symbol of our two destinies ! I instinctively experienced, before even knowing Mademoiselle Favier, the shameful timidity of the sentiment of which Jacques experienced the joy.

" You are paying court to her, that is what you mean ? " I asked him.

" No, she is courting me," he said with a laugh, " or rather has been doing so. But why should I

not tell you, for if I introduce you to her, she will tell you everything in five minutes ? In fact, she is my mistress. With my reputation, my investments, my books, I can marry whom I please ; and there is plenty of time. The pear is ripe. But if we were always reasonable, we should be only common people, should not we ? She began it. If you had seen, at rehearsal, how she stealthily devoured me with her eyes ! I took good care not to notice her. She is a coquette and a half. An author who has a mistress at the theatre when he does not act himself, is responsible for a serious orthographical error. You know the proverb : the architect does not hobnob with the mason. But after the first performance, after the battle was won, I let myself go. Here is another human document : little Favier had gone through the Conservatoire, had been on the stage, and my dear fellow she was still virtuous, perfectly virtuous. Do you understand me ? "

" Poor girl ! " I cried involuntarily.

" No, no ! " Jacques replied shrugging his shoulders. " Some lover must be first, and it is better to have a Jacques Molan than a pupil of the Conservatoire, or, as is usually the case, one of the professors there, is it not ? But I am her poesy, her real romance to tell her friends. I have been kind to her. She desired our love concealed from her mother and we did so. She desired meetings in cemeteries at the graves of great men and I have gone there. Can you imagine me, at my age, with a bunch of violets in my hand, waiting for a friend

with my elbows sentimentally resting upon the tomb of Alfred de Musset, a poet whom I detest? Quite a student's idyll, is it not? I repeat it is very foolish, but I found her so amiable and so fresh the first time. She 'rested me' from this Paris in which everything is vanity."

"And now?" I asked.

"Now?" he repeated, and the insolent and sensual expression came into his eyes once more. "You want me to confess? That is two months ago, and a two months' idyll is a little less fresh, amiable and restful." Then in a lower and more confidential tone he asked: "Do you know pretty Madam Pierre de Bonnivet?"

"You still seem to forget that I am not a fashionable painter," I replied, "that I have not a little house on the Monceau Plain, that I do not ride in the Bois, and frequent the noble Faubourg though I live there."

"Don't let us mix up our localities," he replied with his usual assurance. "The Monceau Plain and the Bois have nothing in common with the Faubourg and the nobility, nor has the charming person to whom I am referring, anything in common, except her name, with the real Bonnivet descended from the constable or admiral, the friend of Francis I."

"There is one less imbecile among her ancestors then," I interrupted. "That is one of the advantages the false nobility sometimes has over the true nobility."

"Good," Jacques said, shrugging his shoulders

at the sally with which I had satisfied my ill-humour against her pretensions. "You remind me of Giboyer. You are a pedant, sir. But I shall not defend what you call the noble Faubourg against your attacks. I have seen enough of it to never wish to set foot in it again. There is too much fashion about it for me. Grand drawing-rooms are not in my line. I have nothing to do with aristocratic ladies. One-twentieth of the women in Paris, some young, some not, some titled, some not, have pretensions to be literary, political, or æsthetic, but they are all brainy and intellectual, and they are not courtesans. My pleasure is to turn them into courtesans when it is worth the trouble. If I ever show you Bonnivet, you will agree that she is worth the trouble. Besides there is at her house lively conversation and good food. Don't look so disgusted. After ten years in Paris even with my stomach, dinner in town becomes a terrible bore. At her house dinner is a feast, the table exquisite and the cellar marvellous. Father Bonnivet has made ten or twelve million francs out of flour. It is not sufficient for his wife for the celebrated men about whom she is curious to honour her drawing-room with their presence. They have to fall in love with her as well, and I believe they have all done so, till now."

I urged him to continue his story, though his cynicism made me shudder, his loquacity exasperated me, and I was horrified at his sentiments, which were so brutally plebeian in their dilettante disguise, for I was greatly interested in his confi-

dences. He gladly opened his heart to me as I listened to him, though he actually liked me no more than I did him. He instinctively felt the fascination he exercised over me and it pleased him. We were at college together, and that strange bond would unite us till death in spite of everything. He went on—

"There is nothing to tell you except that for some time Queen Anne, as her intimate friends call her, absolutely refused to be introduced to me. In parenthesis, I wonder if this name Anne has been selected as coquettishly heraldic? I sometimes dine at the house of Madam Ethorel, her cousin, whom she detests. I met her there, and I also pretended to avoid her. She told any one who would listen to her that I had no talent, and that my books either bored or repelled her, that being the classic method of a fashionable woman who wishes to pique a famous man by not appearing to join the throng of his admirers. Kind friends always let one know of this amiability. *La Duchesse Blue* was produced with some success, as I have told you, and then, I don't know how or why, there came an entire change of front. One of her beaters—she has beaters, just like a sportsman, whom she recruits from her most ardent admirers—Senneterre, whom you know well; the old blond who sometimes takes the bank here, and is a great admirer of mine. Generally we merely exchanged greetings, but instead of that he showered compliments upon me and finished up by inviting me to dine at the Club in the room

reserved for fashionable ladies. That is five weeks ago. 'How are they going to make use of me?' I thought as I went up the stairs. The first person I met in the anteroom, one of the prettiest, most elegant corners in Paris, was Madam Pierre de Bonnivet."

"She was just like little Favier," I interposed, "a coquette and a half. Ever since I have known you your stories have always been the same: they consist of playing with the women who have the least heart, and you always win."

"It is not quite as simple as all that," he replied without getting angry; "I amused myself with Queen Anne, but not in the way you think. The beater placed us side by side at the table. I should like you to have been there in hiding listening to us. The conversation was sweet, simple, friendly and melting, the meeting of two beautiful souls. She spoke well of all the women we knew, and I spoke well of all my colleagues. We declared in agreement that the great awkward Madam de Sauve has never had a lover, and that Dorsenne's novels are his masterpieces, that the demon Madam Moraines is an angel of disinterestedness, and that the noodle, René Vincy is a great poet. Judge of our sincerity. It was as if neither she nor I had ever suspected that one writer could slander another, that a woman of the world could commit adultery. We have taken our revenge since, and we are at this moment in that state of bitter warfare which is disguised by the pretty name of flirtation. I spare you the details. It is sufficient to know that she

is aware that little Favier is my mistress ; she thinks I am madly in love with her, and her sole aim is to steal me from her. Accustomed as she is to masculine ruses, she has laid the snare which has always been successful since the earth has revolved around the sun : there is no virtue like the sensation of stealing a love from another woman. The most curious thing is that Queen Anne might easily have been virtuous. Oh, she is very fast. But I should not be surprised to hear that she has never had a real lover. Besides, if she had had twenty-five lovers her scheme would still have succeeded. I would wager that in the earthly paradise the serpent only told our mother Eve that he was about to pluck the apple for the female of his own species."

"But what of Camille Favier?" I asked.

"Naturally she guessed or else I told her—I don't know how to lie—so she is no less jealous of Bonnivet than Bonnivet is of her. I have not been bored for the last week or two I can assure you. Things have moved quickly, and the rapid are just as successful in gallantry as in everything else."

We were having dessert, and he was balancing a piece of pear on the end of his dessert fork as he concluded his confidence with this brutal cruelty which made me say—

"You are between two women again? You are playing a dangerous game."

"Dangerous?" he interrupted with his confident joviality. "To whom? To me? Happily

or unhappily, I am insured against these fires. To Madam de Bonnivet? If she does not love me, what risk does she run? If she loves me, she will be grateful. Suffering requires feeling, and to women of this kind that is everything. But I think she is as hard as I am. As for Camille, it will develop her talent."

"Suppose one of the lady admirers of the novels of your second period, *Anciennes Amours* or *Martyre Intime*, were to hear you now?" I said to him. "For this is quite the reverse of what you put in those two books."

"Ah!" he said. "If one lived one's books, there would be no trouble in writing them. Come. Let us go down quickly and have coffee. I want you to see the beginning of the first act. I have only one quality, but that is a strong one. I can compose. A play or novel of mine is compact, there is nothing useless in it. The first and third acts are the best in the play. Madam de Bonnivet prefers the second and Camille the fourth. All tastes are suited. Waiter, bring two cups of coffee and two fine cigars at once. Give me just time to cast my eye down the closing prices on the Stock Exchange and I am at your service. Good. My gold mine shares are going up. I am about three thousand francs to the good. How is your money invested?"

"I have not invested it," I said sadly, "it stays where it is and brings in from two and a half to three per cent."

"That is absurd!" Jacques said as he lit a cigar.

" I will advise you. I have good friends, one of the Mosé among others, who keep me well informed. I know as much as they do, and if I were not a literary man, I should like to be a financier. But we must hurry. Queen Anne may be at the theatre this evening, though she has already seen the play four times. If she is there, you will see two comedies instead of one. But I am very glad to have met you this evening."

CHAPTER II

THIS author who could when he liked depict with the greatest subtlety was no fit person to preside over a temperance society. When we reached the little theatre where *La Duchesse Blue* was being performed he was a little more jolly than the beautiful women who drove up in their carriages from all corners of fashionable Paris, suspected. I still felt the inexplicable attraction, a mixture of antipathy and admiration, of which I have spoken. I listened to Jacques as he told me his plans for new works, and I forgot his horrible failings of heart and character in my admiration for the imagination from which ideas spurted, as I had seen the lava in the crater of Vesuvius do, while fiery stones of the size of a man shot into the air with a report like a cannon. There the atmosphere is suffocating and full of stench. The sulphur smokes beneath your feet and burns them. Tears trickle from your eyes. Your breath fails. It is unbearable. But this brutal outburst of the forces of nature keeps you there, hypnotizes you.

Jacques, too, in his way is a force of nature.

His artistic vitality will always overwhelm me, and it did so this evening in proportion with such a hypnotism. For between the formidible exterminating monster which waves its column of smoke above the devastated Pompeii, and the inoffensive cerebral volcano whose smoky eruptions overflow into yellow volumes, or crystallize into three, four or five act plays, the difference is really very great. Without ironical extenuation such a comparison would be rather comic. Whether justified or not, I gave myself up to this sensation without discussion. Wearied as I was by my day of moral lassitude, was not this way of spending my evening an unexpected pleasure. The comedy might interest me, for this foppish egoist had great talent. The actress might be pretty, although doubtless Jacques' fatuity had transformed for my astonishment a Conservatoire fool into a bird of paradise. I had too often accompanied Claude Larcher into Colette Rigaud's dressing-room not to know these footlight-mistresses and their vulgarity. But there are always exceptions, and Madam Pierre de Bonnivet might be an exception to her class, although a rich woman who collects celebrities was hardly likely to please me. In any case it was worth the trouble of accompanying Molan to the Vaudeville simply to have the pleasure of seeing him enter the theatre.

"We will go in by the stage door," he said in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin. It is very charming here in the two little stage boxes, and upon the stage behind the curtain. We can get to the

boxes through the wings if either of them is vacant."

He got out of the carriage before me as he said this; he greeted the door-keeper and went through a doorway and up a staircase with the gait which is unique in the world, that of the fashionable author visiting his paper, his editor, or his theatre. Every gesture seemed to say, "The house belongs to me"; his foot was lighter, his cane waved in his hand, and his shoulders involuntarily swaggered. These things are in themselves of no importance, but we painters who have studied portraiture make it our business to seize upon these trifles. The theatre staff when they saw "their author" pass, displayed inexpressible and unconscious respect. How I should like to inspire some picture dealer with like respect? When shall I have in displaying my pictures to a friend the peaceful and innocently puerile pride which Jacques displayed in opening for me the door of one of the stage boxes, fortunately unoccupied, where we sat down while he whispered to me—

"The first act has been in progress for five minutes. You will follow it directly. A former mistress of the Duke's is trying to make the Duchess jealous. Was I lying to you when I said that little Favier is pretty? She has caught sight of me. Fortunately she has nothing to say for a minute or two, or she would have forgotten her lines. She is looking at you. You interest her. She knows the three or four friends I usually bring. Now hear her speak. Is not the timbre, the music

of her voice, exquisite ? Listen to what she is saying."

I have heard *La Duchesse Blue* many times since till I know by heart every phrase. It is a fine delicate play in spite of the affectation of the title. It contains an extremely good study of a rare but very human jealousy. It is the story of a friend who is amorous of his friend's wife, and who remains faithful to his friendship in his love. He never mentioned his feelings to the woman. He has never admitted it to himself, and he cannot bear any one else to pay court to this young woman. He ends by saving her from a irreparable mistake, without her knowing the reason or who he is. The first scene in which the childish Duchess confides in her husband's former mistress, without suspecting the recollections she is awakening by the avowal of her own joys, is a marvel of moving, vibrating analysis, which might be called tenderly cruel. This play is a little masterpiece of to-day by Marivaux—a Marivaux whose airy gaiety would be like lace upon a wound. But I did not perceive the real value of the comedy on this first evening, although Molan was present to comment upon its smallest details. The painter in me was too keenly attracted by the extraordinary appearance of this Camille Favier, whom my friend had so carelessly called his mistress. The box being almost on the stage allowed me to follow the smallest movements of her face, her most furtive winks, and the most rapid knitting of her brows. I could see the layers of cream and rouge

unequally distributed on her face, and the lengthening of her lashes with black crayon. Even made up in this way she realized in an extraordinary way the ideal type created by the most refined English artists: Rossetti, Burne Jones, and Morris. Her fine features were almost too slight for the perspective of the stage. Her large, slightly convex forehead seemed clouded with dreams. The elongated oval of her face made her smile float into her cheeks. Her straight nose, rather short, ennobled her profile. Her full lips drooped at the corners and were at the same time sad and sensual, voluptuous, and bitter. This make up even gave to her beauty a particular charm, which touched me strangely in its mixture of the real and the artificial. Her rosy cheeks were visible through her rouge, the fringe of her long lashes beneath the crayon, the fresh purple of her lips through the carmine, just as in her playing of the part she represented, a true, sincere and tender woman, was visible or seemed to be visible.

"It is the thunder-clap," he said, "you have just felt! You can listen, too. Your sublimes will amalgate, as Saint Simon said of some one. But now turn and look with your glasses in the fourth box of the first tier on the left. You see a woman in white, fanning herself with a fan, with silk muslin flounces, white too, and an invention of her own? That is Madam Pierre de Bonnivet. What do you think of her? It is amusing, is it not, to play the game of love and hazard with these two pretty creatures as partners."

I looked in the direction Jacques indicated, and I soon had my glasses fixed on the fashionable rival of the Bohemian Camille Favier.

The fatuous insolence which my comrade affected then appeared to me justified, and more than justified, by the beauty of this elegant female who coquetted with him, as he told me. I knew he was too daring a fellow not to go on quickly from liberty to liberty. If Camille recalled, even with her rouge and patches, the Psyches and Galateas of the most suave of the Pre-raphaelite Brothers, Madam Pierre de Bonnivet, with her arched nose, her wilful chin, the fine line of the cheek, her elegant haughty mouth, had beauty enough to justify the most aristocratic pretensions. How, coming of a poor family—I have found out since that she was a Taraval—she inevitably recalled one of those princesses so dear to Van Dyck, that incomplete master, whom no other has equalled, in the art of portraying breeding, and the indomitable pride and heroic energy concealed beneath the fragility of feminine grace. The habits of wealth for two or three generations produce these mirages.

It is certain that the painter of the divine Marquise Paola Brignole, of the Red Palace at Genoa, never found a model more suited to his genius. His brush alone could have properly reproduced the glory of that tint whose dead white was not anæmic—the red lips told that—with the cloud of blonde hair which paled in the light. The simple sight of the thick rolls of golden hair lying upon her neck, when she turned her head, betokened that

physiological vitality of one of those slender persons who conceal beneath the tenderness of a siren the courage of a captain of dragoons. Her neck, though a little long, was well developed, and the fingers of her nervous hands were a little long also ; her bust, which was outlined at each movement by her supple white corsage, was so young, so elegant, and so full. But the most significant thing to me about this creature of luxury was her blue eyes, as blue as those of the other woman, with this difference, that the blue of Camille Favier's eyes recalled the blue of the petals of a flower, while Madam de Bonnivet's eyes were the azure of metal or precious stone. They gave one the idea of something implacable, in spite of their charm, something hard and frigidly dangerous in their magnetism. To complete this singular sensation of graceful cruelty, when the young woman laughed her lips were raised a little too much at the corners displaying sharp white teeth close together, almost too small, like those of a precious animal of the chase.

In to-day trying to exactly reproduce the impressions which I felt in the presence of Jacqnes Molan's two partners in his favourite game of heartless love, I am taking into account that my actual knowledge of their characters influences my recollection of this first meeting. I do not think I am giving too powerful a touch to this souvenir. I can still hear myself say, while applause was being showered upon little Favier, to Jacques—

"You make a good choice, when you like."

"I do what I can," he said as he nodded his head.

"I am asking myself," I continued, "with mistresses of such beauty——"

"One mistress," he corrected me. "Madam de Bonnivet is not my mistress."

"It comes to the same thing, as far as it concerns what I am going to say. I am asking myself how you manage to escape scandal."

"I am like Proudhon," he replied with a laugh, "whom Hugo pretended had the skin of a toad in his pocket. It appears that this charm protects one from every danger."

"Do you think your luck will hold? Then what of the women themselves?"

"Larcher has an axiom: 'a woman is the best antidote against another woman.'"

"But the result of that is spiteful vengeance, vitriol, and the revolver. One of these two women I should not trust."

As I said that I pointed with my cane to Madam Bonnivet.

"Really! beautiful Queen Anne gives you the impression, also, of a coquettish bird of prey, of a little spitfire of a falcon, whom it is not wise to tease. Ah, well! If you like," he went on as he got up, "the act is over, I will present you to one or the other of them. It is very funny. Would you believe that in my stories I have always more or less need of a looker-on. When we think that there are people foolish enough to criticize the

classic tragedies on this account ? In my opinion there is no more natural person.

He took my arm as he said this, assigning me the part of witness, of satellite borne along in the orbit of its sun. It is a strange thing that I am really made for those secondary parts, Pylades to an Orestes, Horatio to Hamlet, and his coolness did not wound me. Alas ! it has been decreed that I should be, like Horatio, always and everywhere an unsuccessful man. What irony to have as my Hamlet the implacable egotist who was showing me the way to little Favier's dressing-room ! I followed him behind the scenes, up a staircase crowded with dressers and supernumeraries, and along corridors full of doors from behind which came the sounds of laughter, singing, argument, and of expressions used at a card-party.

Previously I had only been behind the scenes at the Comédie Française of the famous theatres, where I often accompanied the unfortunate Claude. At that theatre was to be found the correct and conventional respectability which too often spoils the acting of members of the company of that famous house. My horror of pretentiousness has always made me dislike the Comédie, with its elegant appearance, its secular portraits, its venerable busts, and its elegant green room. There more than elsewhere I have experienced the disenchantment of the contrast between the play and the back of the stage, between theatrical prestige and its kitchen. On the contrary, behind the scenes of the smaller theatres, where my friends

have taken me, the Varieties, the Gymnase and the Vaudeville on that evening, I have felt the picturesque antitheses, the supple improvization, the animal energy which constitute an actor's business. Chance willed that in the company of Jacques Molan, after being a prey to impuissance for the entire day, I should find a complete cure for my vitality. Did we not hear, as we knocked at the door of Mademoiselle Favier's dressing-room, the following dialogue exchanged by two actors playing the piece, the famous Bressorè, and a gentleman in a frock coat and tall hat, whose clean-shaven face and bluish cheeks showed he was an actor of this or some other company.

"I was not up to much in my new part," the latter asked, "was I? Tell me the truth?"

"You were very good," Bressorè replied, "but you have one failing."

"What is that?"

"You don't stand firm and look the audience straight in the face."

"That fellow has just mentioned the secret of success in the arts," Jacques Molan said to me with a laugh; "between ourselves as friends, you are a little lacking in assurance yourself. If I met you more often I would give you——"

In saying this he did not suspect how gaily and hardly he was touching a sore in my artistic conscience, and I did not give him the answer which rose to my lips. "That simply proves the baseness and brutality of success, and that the artist who succeeds is often a charlatan in disguise."

He had just knocked at the dressing-room door. A voice had answered, "Who is there?" then without waiting for a reply the door opened and Camille Favier appeared with a smile of happiness upon her pretty face which changed into a constrained expression when she saw that her lover was not alone.

"Ah!" she said, slightly confused, "I did not think you would bring any one, and my dressing-room is untidy."

"That does not matter," said Jacques as he gently pushed her back into the room with one hand and introduced me with the other. "My friend is no one of importance as you think he is, little Blue Duchess. He is a very old friend of mine and a painter, a very great painter, you understand. All our friends are great men. He is used to disorder in his own studio, so make your mind easy. He asked to be introduced to you because he has long wished to paint your portrait." He nudged me with his elbow to warn me not to contradict his delicate handling of the truth. "I forgot to mention his name, M. Vincent la Croix. Do not say you have seen his work, for he shows very little. He belongs to the timid school. You are warned. Now the ice is broken let us sit down."

"You can do so," the young woman said with a laugh. My companion's banter, though not very flattering to me, had already transformed her. "You will allow me to tidy up a little?" she went on as with almost incredible rapidity she spread a clean towel over a basin of soapy water in which

she had just washed her hands. She rolled up and threw under the dressing-table several other dirty towels. She put the lids on three or four boxes of pomade, and hung a red wrapper over a chair, on which I had noticed a well worn pair of common corsets, which she generally wore for economy's sake. She did all this with a smile, and then noticed a pair of pale green stockings which she wore upon the stage. These she picked up with wonderful quickness, and I thought I could detect a tremor of shame in her as she did so. Those silk stockings which still displayed the shape of her fine leg and tiny foot were a small part of her nudity. She concealed them in the first object which came to hand, and it turned out to be a hat-box. "That is all," she said as she turned to Jacques. "Do you think I anticipated your visit and changed my costume in ten minutes, watch in hand? You will not have to endure the presence of my dresser, who, poor woman, displeases you." She went on in a caressing and frightened tone: "Were you satisfied with me this evening? Did I play my great scene well?"

If she had seduced me the moment I saw her on the stage by her charming finesse and ingenuous grace, how the charm worked with more powerful magic in these common surroundings still more unworthy of her! This simple dressing-room, so untidy, so lacking in embroidery and ornaments, where everything seemed a makeshift for the sake of economy, recalled to me by its contrast the sumptuousness and luxury of the dressing-room

where Colette Regaud reigned at the Français. Ah, if Colette had only had for Claude, when I accompanied that unfortunate fellow to her dressing-room, the evident love which the Blue Duchess showed for Jacques Molan even in the tones of her most ordinary conversation, the ardour of her most fleeting glances, and the fever of her smallest gestures! She was a delightful child, who loved as she gave herself, with her whole being, naturally and spontaneously. What divine tenderness my companion enjoyed simply out of vanity! I felt how delighted he was while talking to his mistress, at directing this little performance! His eyes became shining instead of tender. I could see that he was studying me in a mirror in front of us, instead of looking at the love-sick girl as he answered her—

"You were exquisite as you always are. Ask Vincent if I did not say so?"

"Is that true?" she asked.

"Quite true," I replied.

"He echoed my remarks too, I assure you," Jacques continued.

"Then I really acted my scene well," she said, with a naïve gleam of contentment in her eyes; then she knitted her brows and nodding her pretty head said: "ah, well, I am surprised at it."

"Why?" I asked her in my turn.

"You ought not to ask her that," Jacques said, with a laugh. "I know beforehand what her answer will be."

"No," she said quickly, and her mobile mouth

assumed the bitter curve it had in repose. "Do not listen to him, sir. His is going to tease me, and it is very unkind of him, about one of the nervous impressions which we all have—you two as well. Do you not sometimes experience a shudder of antipathy in the company of certain people, whose presence alone freezes you and takes away all at once your memory, your power, and your mind? Their presence alone produces a feeling that one cannot breathe the same air as them without being stifled."

"Yes, I do know those antipathies!" I cried. "I feel them for people I meet by chance, whom I have never seen before, who are nothing to me, but their approach is quite intolerable to me, just as if they were my avowed enemies. Once I used to try and resist this instinctive feeling of repulsion. I found from experience that I was always wrong not to yield to it, and I am sure to-day that an antipathy of this kind, either strong or slight, is nature's second sight, and an infallible warning that a danger threatens us through the being whose existence annoys us thus."

"You see," Camille said turning to Molan, "I am not so ridiculous after all."

I had at once guessed the name of the person whose presence in the theatre so disconcerted this frail Burne-Jones nymph, transformed by the bad fairy presiding over her destiny into a poor devil of an actress in love with the writer in Paris the most incapable of love. If I had not guessed the name Jacques would not have left me in ignor-

ance of it for long. He is no worse than any one else. I have heard of his good actions and seen his generosity. To my knowledge he has put his purse at the disposal of colleagues whom he had more or less slandered. It is difficult to reconcile that, for example with the indelicate unkindness which made him name his mistress' rival at a time when he saw the pretty child was so troubled. The explanation, however, is quite simple. Such a thing as good or evil, unkindness or generosity, never entered into his calculations. He always played to the gallery, and a single spectator sufficed to compose this gallery, which in turn made him perform the best or worst actions, and made him magnanimous or mean. While playing the part of looker-on for him I realized how correct are the casuists who pretend that our actions are nothing, but our motives everything. His motives I could see as distinctly as the movement of a watch in a glass case.

"She talks to you in enigmas," he said to me with a gleam in his eyes which meant: "You shall see if my diagnosis is correct and if she loves me." How could this Tussolin Don Juan resist the chance of satisfying two vanities at the same time, that of the observer and that of the seducer? He went on: "I am going to amuse you with the name of the member of the audience who so troubles her this evening? She is not so complex as you are, and it is simply a woman who gives her this feeling of annoyance."

"Jacques!" the actress cried in a supplicating

voice, without noticing that the use of his Christian name betrayed their secret even more than her lover's odious teasing.

"I warn you that Vincent is one of her admirers," the latter insisted in spite of this appeal.

"Ah!" Camille said, looking at me with a sudden feeling of distrust; "does he know her?"

"He is teasing you, mademoiselle; I have seen in the theatre no face to which I could give a name."

"Then I am a liar," Molan went on, "and you did not say just now that Madam Pierre de Bonnivet was a Van Dyck who had stepped out of a picture just as, according to you, the Blue Duchess has stepped from a picture by Burne Jones. There is no need to be surprised, Camille. Comparison with pictures is a mania with painters. To them a woman or a landscape is only a bit of canvas without a frame. This little infirmity is to their mind what an ink stain is to us authors, and he displayed, in spite of his elegant attire as a man about town, a slight black stain upon the middle finger of his right hand where he held his pen. "That is just like the rouge upon the actress' face, the little professional mark. Yes or no, did you say that about Madam de Bonnivet?"

"It is quite right I said that," I quickly replied, "but mention the fact that it was you who pointed this woman out to me, and that I have not been introduced to her. I told you, too, that I could see in her eyes a frightfully hard and bitter look. In spite of her beauty, elegance, and slenderness

to me she seems almost ugly, and more than that—repulsive; I can quite understand Mademoiselle Favier's impression.

The look of gratitude which the actress threw me was a fresh admission of her liaison with my friend. Besides she no more thought of concealing it than he did, though for a different reason. She could not conceal it because she was so much in love, while he paraded the intrigue because he was not in love at all. He caught her look and resumed in his bantering tone—

"Ah, well, Camille, see how good I am. I have brought you some one to talk to you. He understands you already. Think what it will be when he has painted your portrait! For he is going to do so for me! Are you agreeable?"

"Perhaps your friend has not the time just now!"

"Did not I tell you that was the reason of our visit?" he replied. I myself was rather afraid that this project would fall through. "But time is up, you must be on the stage when the curtain rises," I said. "Good-bye, mademoiselle."

"No," he continued, "good-bye till presently. Is it not so, Camille?"

"Certainly," she said with a laugh. I saw by her eyes that she was experiencing a little emotion. "Allow me to say a word to your friend?" she added turning to me.

"Good!" I thought. "She is going to reproach him, and she will be right." I fell into a melancholy reverie which contrasted with the place where

I was, at least as much as did the delicate sensibility revealed by each of the young actress' gestures and words. We had only been with her a quarter of an hour, and in that time the appearance of the corridor had changed. Feverish haste now betokened the approaching rise of the curtain and the fear of being too late. The call-boy went along knocking at a door here and there. Visitors hurriedly departed. The game of bezique went on in a neighbouring dressing-room, that of an actress who only appeared in the last act.

"Here I am," Jacques said, interrupting my meditation by touching me on the shoulder, "let us get back to our box at once. If Camille does not see me when she appears on the stage, she will look for me in Madam de Bonnivet's box and lose her power."

"Why do you amuse yourself by exciting her jealousy?" I replied. "How can you be so hard-hearted? You pained her just now. She was angry."

"Angry?" he cried, "angry? Why she has just asked me to see her home to-night. Her mother is not coming for her. Angry? Why women love teasing. It troubles them at first, but then they are like all vicious animals, they can only be subdued by hurting them. I want you now to see her rival. About the middle of the act Favier goes off the stage, and I will go to Madam de Bonnivet's box and ask permission to present you. You shall see what a different woman she is."

CHAPTER III

TO-DAY as I pass in detail these recollections, just as one inks over a half-effaced pencil route upon a map, I clearly understand a truth which escaped me at the time. I had fallen in love with Camille Favier the moment I saw her on the stage with her fine beautiful face so like the art type of a master whom I have studied much. This little actress, of whom I knew nothing, except that she spoke well and was the mistress of a fashionable author, had at once touched one of the most vibrating fibres in my heart. In spite of Molan's boasting, in spite of the childish grace of her reception, she might be a profligate or a schemer. Certainly she was a very cunning innocent, since by my companion's confession the siege of her virtue had nothing in common, either in length or in difficulty, with the seige of Troy or even the siege of Paris. A person does not reflect much when his heart is captivated as mine was.

This child already occupied such a prominent place in my feelings, that the idea of her leaving the theatre with Molan that evening gave me a strange feeling of sadness. Now that the time is past I can explain these impressions; then I con-

tented myself with feeling them. Seated in the box, opera glass in hand, I thought in good faith that this sadness proceeded to establish that commonplace and discouraging statement, that the most beloved of men are those who love the least. Then neither use nor age have hardened me concerning disloyalty in love. I never could lie to a mistress, even one engaged like an extra cook for a week. Actually I have not known many of that sort. My caprices have lasted for eight years, and I have experienced deception which ought to make me indulgent where the ruses of men against women are concerned. People like Jacques Molan revenge us others who have never made ourselves loved, simply because we love. Perhaps I ought to have experienced in this box at the Vaudeville on this strange evening that not very delicate but very natural feeling, the joy of the avenged company, if the victim of that vengeance had not been the little Blue Duchess. When she appeared on the stage, I was seized with pity at noticing the happier look in her eyes, the more joyful fire of her acting, and the visible tremors in her supple and nervous person, of a lover who believes herself loved. When she disappeared into the wings, my pity grew and changed into indignation. My friend got up with a malicious look upon his face. As I watched him in the distance enter Madam de Bonnivet's box I said to myself not without bitterness—

" Why can one only please a woman by being as womanish as herself in the worst sense of the

word? The charming Camille is happy now. She is undressing and dressing with the gaiety of a brave creature who has been under fire and won a battle for the man she loves. She has acted so well in this scene. Hardly is her back turned when he deceives her. This treachery doubles the pleasure he experiences in manœuvring with the other woman. No coquette ever had her eyes so lit with desire to please as the famous author then. He is cordially shaking hands with the two men who are with the lady! One of them probably is her husband and the other a rival. Good, he is talking of me, for her wicked blue eyes had fixed me with the aid of glasses. Let me follow the play. It will be more worthy and more agreeable."

Was I talking to myself quite frankly? No, alas, I vaguely felt I was not. Molan's perfidy, and it alone, would not have disgusted me like this. Had it been applied to any other person than the little Burne-Jones girl of the Vaudeville I should have found it amusing enough. Particularly I should have been diverted by his somewhat sheepish look when he got back to our box.

"You have not quite the air of triumph I expected, but everything seemed to go on well from the distance."

"Very well," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Madam de Bonnivet has invited me to supper with her after the performance."

"But what of little Favier?" I asked.

"You have put your finger on the sore," he

replied. I have promised to see her home. I cannot desert her at the last moment."

"Ah, well!" I said, "desert Madam de Bonnivet. She does not play in the piece, and as you admitted just now is a coquette and a half. She will invite you again."

"In the meantime, I have accepted," he interrupted, "that was the coquettish thing to do. Playing with women would be very simple if it only consisted of feigning coldness. There are times when one has to take a high hand with them, while at others one must obey their lightest caprice. So I repeat I have accepted. I must find a way of getting rid of Camille. Good," he said after a moment's silence; "I think I have it if you will help me. I will present you to Madam de Bonnivet. She will invite you to supper; she is a woman of that sort. You will refuse."

"I should refuse in any case," I replied. "But I do not understand your scheme."

"You will see later," he said, his eyes again expressing the joy he felt in performing before a sympathetic audience of one; "give me the pleasure of scheming and promise to do something else for me. Oh, it is nothing wrong, noble person. This is the interval. Before going to see Queen Anne, we will go and see Camille again. It is all in the scheme. What a good house there is to-night!"

The curtain had fallen amid enthusiastic applause and frequent calls, while Jacques associated me, almost without my consent, with his

trickery. I had a good mind to refuse, for it was scarcely in accordance with my recent indignation. My scruples gave way to my curiosity to know how this M. Célemère of literature would escape from the snare in which he had entangled himself. At least that was the excuse I found for myself. To-day I think I yielded simply on account of the attraction the pretty actress had for me. A person should never be too severe about another's deceit. The most scrupulous are ready to accept and aid their schemes, when they are in accordance with their own secret desires. The real cynical truth was that we went into the wings to reach the retreat where the pseudo-Burne-Jones was waiting for us, as an actress waits. Though the actress' affection for her lover was sincere, she was none the less the fashionable *comédienne* who had to humour her admirers, and she could not even keep the seclusion of her modest dressing-room intact. Voices were audible as we approached it. Jacques listened to them for a moment with a nervous expression of face which made me forgive him for much. If he was teasing it was because he was jealous. Consequently his unconcerned mockery was a pretence. I learned once more from his example that there is not necessarily any connexion between jealousy and love.

"Camille is not alone," he said.

"Then we will return later," I replied. "She will prefer to talk to you more privately, and it is better, too, seeing what you say to her."

"On the contrary," he replied with a sudden

gay smile in a low tones, "I can recognize the two voices, they belong to Tournade and Figon. You don't know them, do you? Figon is wonderful; you shall see him. He is a very fine specimen of a snob, a disgusting helot of vanity. Tournade is the son of the great candle maker; everybody burns Tournade candles. Of course he is worth millions of francs, and I am inclined to think he is willing to lay a few at Camille's feet. Ah," he went on still more maliciously, "you are going to lose the flower of your first impression. The little woman has a heart and more delicacy than her profession allows, but a person is not at the theatre for nothing, and she does not always take the same tone she did with us just now. Come along, be brave!"

He knocked at the door with his cane in a way which somewhat contradicted his words. There was a certain amount of authority combined with nervousness in his knock "Decidedly there is more in it than he is willing to admit," I said to myself while the door was opening. Two lamps and several candles all lighted had made the atmosphere of the narrow room stifling, and there were in it besides the actress and her dresser, the persons Jacques had mentioned.

I recognized at once the two types of fast men so wonderfully drawn by Forain. One, whom I guessed by his looks to be Tournade, had a fat red face, like that of an overfed coachman, with a heavy and ignoble mouth, brutal, sly and satiated eyes, an incipient baldness, short red whiskers,

and the shoulders of a professional boxer. He had a hand, with long fat fingers covered with big rings with large stones in them. Some greedy peasant lives over again in people of this kind, and they bring to a life of elegant debauchery the ignobly positive soul of a usurer's son with a porter's temperament. The other one, Figon, was thin and weak, with a never-ending nose, and every tooth in his head was a masterpiece of gold stopping. His eyes were green and twinkling. His sparse hair, narrow shoulders, and worn-out spine were a fine example of the exhaustion found in every race which would justify the anger of the workers against the middle classes if they themselves, who are nourished and corroded by the same vices, were not still less worthy. Both the obese Tournade and the skinny Figon had that way of wearing evening dress, the large gilt buttons on the front, the buttonhole, and the hat on the back of the head, all of which constitute the uniform of foolishness or infamy, which the genial caricaturist of the Doux Pays—that jeering Goya of the dismal revels of Paris—has illustrated in his legends, in which its correctness makes its baseness more apparent.

Lighted by the rough lights of the little dressing-room, these two visitors were standing leaning against the wall, handling their canes in a brutish way, and watching the little actress who was at her toilette with a wrapper round her shoulders. She was making up her face for the next act in which she had to appear in disguise, in the costume

of the picture after which the play was called, all in blue from the satin of her shoes to the ribbon in her hair. The only long chair and couch had a dress and cloak spread out on them. Evidently the persons had intruded upon her, had not been asked to sit down, and she was about to dismiss them. This sign of her independence caused me keen pleasure. I conceived for these young fellows a violent antipathy—after that how could I doubt presentiments ?—especially for the candle maker's heir, who exchanged a brief greeting with Jacques. Figon made use, to the fashionable author, of all the usual "dear masters," and eulogies of the piece which were imbecile platitudes.

Jacques received these compliments with his mouth pursed up. Incense is always agreeable however common it may be, even when it is in the vulgar form of tobacco smoke. He nodded his head as Figon concluded.

"You are my two favourite authors, you and——" I will not repeat here the name of the obscene and outrageously mediocre writer with whom the fool associated poor Jacques. The latter gave a start which almost made me burst out laughing, while the actress interrupted—

"Are you going to be quiet ?" she said. "I have already told you that I would put up with you if you never spoke of books or the theatre." When she addressed the young man, he looked at her grinning with stupidity, and she continued : "If Molan does not bring you into his next play, he will be good to you. What do you think he has

just told me, Jacques, about Gladys, his old mistress; you know her, the woman you called the 'Gothen du Gotha,' because of her love affairs with smart people. She left him for a counter-jumper; and now she has left the counter-jumper to live with a lord, so we can recognize her again, M. de Figon says."

"Come," Tournade interposed with the air of authority of a smart man who does not wish another man of his own set to be treated with a lack of respect in the presence of ordinary literary men or painters; "you know very well that Louis was joking, and it is not kind of you to chaff him. You would be the first to grieve if you saw his name in some newspaper."

"First of all," she replied turning to him, "these gentlemen are not journalists; find out to whom you are talking, my boy. For a day when you have not been drinking, you are missing a fine opportunity for silence. Besides if you are not satisfied you know this is my dressing-room."

She had such an ugly look as she uttered, with increasing bitterness in her voice, these insolent remarks, and her intention of getting rid of these two young men was so obvious, that I had a feeling of shame and almost pity for them, and especially for Tournade, who though he looked like a brutal and vulgar man, had some pride and blood in his veins. He contented himself with answering by a laugh as common as himself and a shrug of the shoulders, while Jacques said—

"We came to pay our compliments to you, little

Duchess, but it does not appear to be the evening for politeness."

"It is always so for you and your friend," she said, turning to us her face which had become tender once more, and her shining eyes which uttered, proclaimed, and cried aloud this phrase: "Here is my lover whom I love, and I am proud of him; I want you to know him, to quote him; I want the whole world to know him."

"Thank you," said Jacques. Without doubt his fatuity had been sufficiently fed. It displeased him to triumph too openly over a Tournade or a Figon, for he went on: "Allow me just a little criticism?"

Camille cast a fresh glance at him now, somewhat uneasily, as she went on putting the rouge on her face, and he began to quote two insignificant remarks I had made concerning the excessive emphasis at two places in her part. One of them concerned the manner in which the actress had to say to a friend, "I do not want him," speaking of the husband she loved; the other was a gesture on recognizing the writing on the address of a letter.

I could not help admiring the change of look and voice in both of them in the course of this little discussion. The sudden seriousness of their faces showed how, in spite of his vanity in himself, and his passion for her, the reality of their personality was there in the technicality of their art. They had forgotten the existence of Tournade, Figon, and myself. On their part the two men

about town pretended to talk of things which interested them, which we could not understand. I heard the names of horses, no doubt famous at that time, mentioned: Farfadet, Shannon, Little Duck and Fichue Rosse, alternating with the professional phrases of the author and the actress. Ah, how quickly the shrewd Molan had appropriated the two poor ideas I had given him without mentioning their origin! His sole consideration for my feelings was to call me to support his thesis!

"Ask Vincent, for he has studied faces."

"Ah, well!" he said to me a few minutes later as we were leaving before Tournade and Figon, "we will leave her a prey to the beasts, like a Christian martyr, though she may be neither a Christian nor a martyr. You saw that she conceals a little roughness under her pre-Raphaelite profile, like many of her fellows. Now we have gone, those two funny fellows will occupy her attention. What a singular machine a woman is! You would think that a watertight bulkhead separated the lover from the ordinary woman."

"Does she often lose her temper like that?" I asked him; "and why do those two fellows put up with such treatment?"

"Bah!" he replied with his habitual modesty, "she would have said much more to them to prove that I was the only person she loved. For between ourselves I know that Tournade is courting her. Do you think that in their eyes the pleasure of saying while they are standing at a bar about midnight imbibing a drink through a straw, "We

were with little Favier just now, how quaint she is ? " counts for nothing. Then as we reached our box and I made as if to enter he said : " No ! no ! you forget we must first pay Madam de Bonnivet a visit."

" Whose invitation I will refuse. That is agreed." He took my arm and one of the staff opened most respectfully for us the communicating door between the stage and the auditorium. As we mounted the staircase my friend continued : " As a recompense to you, I will let you into one of the details of the plan which will enable me to get rid of Camille this evening. You will see what a good idea it is. With women, especially actresses, I believe in tremendous untruths. Remember the receipt. They are the only sort which succeed, because they do not believe any one would have the audacity to invent such stories. Presently during the last act I shall have a letter brought to me which I shall pretend to read. You are there ! I shall display great astonishment and scribble a few words upon my card which I leave with you. Then I shall go out. Camille will have seen it all and will be uneasy. She will play her great scene with nervous force. That is what is required. Afterwards you will take my card to her, on which I shall explain that Fomberteau —you know him well, don't you ? No. He is one of the few critics who has not picked holes in the Duchess, and on that account Camille loves him—that Fomberteau has had this evening an altercation with a colleague and wants to see me

so that I may act on his behalf. I shall not be able to refuse. You will confirm the story. She believes you and the feat will be accomplished. But Madam de Bonnivet's box is 32, and we have passed it. Good, here it is."

He knocked at the door as he said this, but the knock was more deferential than the one just before had been at the dressing-room door.

A man in a black coat opened the door to us with a smile, greeted us and disappeared. It was Bonnivet to whom I was introduced, then I was presented to Madam de Bonnivet, and then to the Vicomte de Senneterre, who was the "beater." I was soon sitting upon one of the chairs vacated by one of these gentlemen. The lady was picking bits of frosted raisin from a box with a pair of golden tongs. She ate them, showing her small white teeth as she did so with a sort of sensual cruelty.

"Are you going to paint little Favier's portrait, M. la Croix? Molan told me you were," she asked. "She is a pretty girl. I hope you will give her another expression though. If the dear master were not here I would say that when she is not talking she is like the classic cow watching the train pass."

She looked at the man of letters whom she called "dear master" as she spoke with sovereign impertinence. Knowing him to be the lover of this woman to whom she applied this vulgar epigram, what impertinence this was with a harsh laugh as its accompaniment! Her laughter, the voice of

her eyes, was pretty but metallic, clear but implacable, a gay laugh which sounded frightfully brutal to me! If one could not—I repeat this as it was the striking impression of this first meeting—imagine real warm tears from those eyes of stony blue, neither could one imagine her stifling a sigh, nor imagine music in her voice, nor indulgence in her gaiety. But that which at once made her distasteful to me was not her words—the meanness of a jealous woman was their justification—it was a curious trait in her personality.

How can I find words for the indefinable shades of expression on her face which three pencil lines and two touches of colour would clearly reproduce? How can I explain that something about her which was at the same time insensible and enervated, glacial and crazy, and so plain in the contrast between her banter and her fine aristocratic profile, which was almost ideal: between her jeering laugh and her fine mouth, between the disdainful carriage of her neck and her willingly familiar manners? This pretty delicate head, with its haughty and fragile grace, which had at once evoked in me the image of a queen of elfs with its blonde hair and flowerlike complexion, was, I have since understood, the victim of the most terrible ennui in the world, that which absolute insensibility in the midst of all the good things of the world, and the radical incapacity of enjoying anything when one possesses all one desires, inflicts upon us. Since then, I have thought the "dear master" was very greatly mistaken on his own

account, that this ennui, so like that of a man of the world growing old, perhaps came from abuse, and that there was a *blasé* woman in this weary one. I guessed that she had dared many things with singular intrepidity. But there was no need for these hypotheses upon the secrets of her life for uneasiness to overcome me. The direct way in which she questioned me, who cannot bear questioning, gave me a feeling of insecurity.

"Have you known Molan long?" she asked me.

"About fifteen years," I replied.

"Have you ever seen him in love except in his books?"

"You will at once intimidate him, madam," my friend replied for me. "He is not used to your imperial manner."

She went on, still keeping her eyes fixed on Molan, though addressing me—

"Has little Favier any brains?"

"Oh, yes!" he replied quickly and in good faith. I should have made the same answer to this creature whose accent alone was sufficient to irritate me. I then began an enthusiastic eulogy of the poor girl I hardly knew, and who had surprised me by her sudden vulgarity. Jacques listened to me as I sang the praises of his mistress in a stupor which Madam de Bonnivet construed into a sense of umbrage. She was not the woman to neglect this opportunity of sowing the seeds of discord between two friends. It is my test for all feminine or masculine natures, this instinctive tremor of sympathy or antipathy before the sentiments of

others. It was sufficient for Madam de Bonnivet to believe that Jacques and I were united by sincere comradeship, for the temptation to sever this friendship to seize her.

"Stop," she said; "should the painter be so amorous of his model?" She laughed her wicked laugh. Then suddenly she turned her head and said to her husband: "Pierre, you don't take enough exercise, you are getting fat. It makes you look ten years older than you really are. You should take Senneterre as your example." This evening the "beater" was polished and fastened together like an old piece of furniture, so that this praise of his apparent youth was fearful irony. "Come," she concluded, "don't get angry, but have some raisins, they are exquisite."

"What an amiable child!" I said to myself as she offered us the box of fruit in a peevish way. "What time is she put to bed?" Her character, which had no inner truth, was ceaselessly dominated by a double need in which two moral miseries were manifest: the unhealthy appetite for producing an effect developed in her by the abuse of worldly success, the even more unhealthy appetite for emotion at all costs, the result of secret licentiousness, which had made her *blasé*, and her lack of heart. Have I mentioned that she was a mother, and that she did not love her child, who had been at a boarding school for years? She could not dispense with astonishment, and she had that strange taste for fear, that singular pleasure of provoking man's anger, that joy of feeling that

she was threatened with brutality which is the great sign of woman in her natural state. Except on serious occasions the most childish things were good enough to procure for her these two emotions : such as dazzling a poor devil of a painter by ways so contrary to her social pretensions, and lighting in her husband's eyes, without any cause, the light of anger which I had just seen there.

Senneterre and Bonnivet began to laugh a similar laugh to that of Tournade and Figon in little Favier's dressing-room. The comparison struck me at once, as it has done under different conditions when I have skirted "High Society." The actress and the woman of the world had exactly the same bad tone. Only the bad tone of the delicate Burne-Jones girl betrayed a depth of passionate soul, and an extraordinary facility for allurement, while in the case of Madam de Bonnivet it was the intolerable and fantastic caprice of the spoilt child; but it was very fine, for no shade of feeling escaped her, not even the antipathy of an unimportant person like myself, nor the ill-humour of her husband disguised by his laughter.

"My dear Senneterre," Bonnivet had simply said, "we are done with. But an old husband and an old friend are umbrellas upon which much rain has fallen!"

There was in these few words a strange mixture of irony with regard to the two artists, new-comers into their circle, to whom the young woman was talking, and a deep irritation which no doubt pro-

cured for her the little tremor of fear she loved to feel. She gave her husband, whom she had so saucily braved, a coquettish glance almost tender, while the glance she gave me was indignant, and rather exciting than provoking. I had irritated her curiosity by being refractory to her seductiveness. Then, changing her conversation, and almost her accent, with a prodigious suddenness, she asked me in the most simple way possible a question about the school of painting to which I belonged. It was a starting point for her to talk of my art, without much knowledge, but strange to say with as much intelligence and good sense as before she had displayed lack of it in her jeering chaff. She talked of the danger to us artists in going much into society, and she spoke according to my idea, with a perfectly accurate view of the failings of vanity and charlatanism which the society of the idle induces. It was as if another person had replaced the original woman. They resembled one another in one point. It was the production of an effect upon a new-comer. Only this time she had divined the precise words it was necessary to use. Cold-blooded coquettes have these intuitions which take the place of knowledge concerning their adorers. I was already too much on my guard to be the dupe of this manœuvre and not to discern its artifice. But still, how could I help admiring her versatility ?

" Is not my little Bonnivet clever ? " Jacques Molan said after we had taken our departure; " she understands everything before it is said. But

why did she not invite you to supper? For she is interested in you. You could see that by Senneterre's ill-humour. He hardly returned your greeting." The game he did not bring was not to his liking, nor was the man who brought it. "Yes," he went on in the tones of a man playing a very careful game and watching every detail of his opponent's play, "why did she not invite you to supper?"

"Why should she invite me?" I asked.

"Obviously to make you talk about Camille and myself," he said.

"After my eulogy of little Favier," I replied, "she had very little to ask me. It did not please her. That is an excellent sign for you, and a sufficient reason for not wishing to hear it again."

"Possibly," he said. "But what do you think of the husband?"

"Weak to allow himself to be spoken to like that, and I am astonished that he does so on account of his broad shoulders. He might well reply with an evil look. But he is weak, I repeat, very weak."

"Yes," Jacques went on, "their relations are stranger than you would think. Bonnivet, you see, is a Parisian husband like many others, who by himself would not move in any circle of society, and who owes his whole position to his wife's coquetry. Husbands of this kind do not always do this by design. But they profit by it and can be divided into three groups: the noodles, who are persuaded against the weight of evidence that

this coquetry is innocent; the philosophic ones, who have made up their minds never to find out how far this coquetry goes; and the jealous ones, who wish to profit by this coquetry to have a full drawing-room and elegant dinners. Besides, they go into a cold sweat at the thought that their wife might take a lover. That was Bonnivet's case. He accepted all the flirtations of Queen Anne with a good grace. He shook my hand. He assisted in silence like the most complaisant of men his better half's manœuvres. Very well, I am of opinion that if he suspected this woman of the least physical familiarity beyond this moral familiarity, he would kill her on the spot like a rabbit. She knows it and is afraid, and that is the reason that she prefers him in her heart to us all, and that in my humble opinion she has not yet deceived him. But she loves to brave his anger in her moments of nerves. She has one of them every hour. Camille is too pretty. Between ourselves that was the origin of the supper: she does not want the little Blue Duchess to be in her admirer's company this evening. I think, too, that was the reason she did not invite you. She hopes you will profit by my absence. It is high comedy. Molière, where is your pen?"

"But," I said to him, as I thought of the two half-mute persons whose rather tragic picture he was painting to me, "if that is your opinion of M. de Bonnivet, it is not reassuring for you when you become his wife's lover."

"If," he answered shrugging his shoulders.

"My dear fellow, I have calculated. To take any woman at all as your mistress is to always run the same number of risks of meeting face to face some one who will kill. It is just like travelling in a carriage or on the railway, or drinking a glass of fresh water which chemists declare is infested with microbes. I brave the dangers, railway accidents, runaway horses, typhoid fevers, and jealous husbands because I love to travel quickly, to refresh and amuse myself. Then Madam de Bonnivet knows her tyrant, her Pierre, who rejoices in the idyllic names of Pierre Amédié Placidi; she knows of what he is capable. She amuses herself by exciting him just far enough to procure for herself that little tremor of fear. When she wants to overstep the mark, she will do it like the reasonable creature she is. Suspicious husbands are like vicious animals. They are ridden more safely after they have been carefully studied and their peculiarities discovered. But now have you a pencil? Good. I will scribble on my card in the box. While we are waiting, let me arrange with the attendant about the letter I want brought to me."

We were at the door of our box. He stopped and exchanged a few words with the attendant, and I saw him hand her a letter which he took from his pocket-book. At this moment his face assumed its real expression, that of a beast of prey, feline and supple, and his fashionable elegance became almost repulsive.

"That is it," he said, "and now we are going

to applaud our friend as if we were not the author and his friend. We owe that to her, poor little girl! She will be so disappointed! Write me a line to-morrow or come and see me to let me know how she takes it. I am not at all uneasy as to the result A woman who loves never suspects the truth. She swallows the most improbable things like a carp does the hook and a yard of string as well."

"But if she guesses that I am lying?" I interrupted. This trick which made me his accomplice weighed upon my conscience, and I was upon the point of refusing my assistance. But if I refused it I should not see Camille again that evening.

"She will not guess," he replied.

"But if she insists and demands my word of honour?"

"Give it to her. In the case of women false oaths are permissible. But she will not ask you. Here she is! Are we not like two conspirators. How pretty she is! To think that if I might have—— But no, there is an old French saying, that the woman a man adores is not the one he possesses, but one he has not yet possessed. You must admit that these words contain more truth than all the works of our analytical friends the hair splitters, Claude Larcher and Julien Dorsenne?"

Camille Favier had reappeared upon the stage. She had begun to act with a happy grace which was changed into nervousness when the attendant brought, according to the plan, into our box the

sham letter from Fomberteau. The actress missed her cue when she saw Jacques take a pencil from his pocket, scribble a few words upon a card, then hand it to me and leave the box. But the impostor was right. Her trouble as a woman only intensified her playing as an actress. She suddenly ceased to look in the direction of the box which her lover had left. The entire strength of her being appeared to be concentrated in her part, and in the great final scene very ingeniously borrowed from *La Princesse Georges*, she displayed a power of pathos which roused the audience to a delirium of enthusiasm. Only when she was recalled by an enthusiastic audience and returned to bow did her eyes again turn to the box in which I sat alone. She expressed in her look her pretty regret at being unable to offer this triumph to her lord and master. As far as I was concerned it was an artist's pride in an artist. But her look was a supplication to me not to go without speaking to her, and when the curtain fell for the last time she came towards me without troubling about being seen by her colleagues.

"What has happened?" she asked. "Where is Jacques gone?"

"He has left this card for you," I answered evasively.

"Come into my dressing-room," she said after looking at the card, "I want to speak to you." Her impatience was so keen that I found her waiting on the stairs for me She seized my arm at once.

"Is it true?" she asked me point-blank. "Is Fomberteau going to fight? With whom? Why?"

"I don't know any more than you do," I replied still with the same indefiniteness.

"Did he know that Jacques was at the theatre this evening? Had they an appointment? Why did he not tell me about it? He knows how interested I am in his friends, especially Fomberteau. He is such a loyal comrade and so bravely defended 'Adèle' and 'La Duchesse'! Don't you see how strange it seems to me?"

"But Jacques seemed as surprised as you are," I murmured.

"Ah!" she said as she gripped my arm more lightly, "you are an honourable man. You cannot lie very well." Then in emotional tones she said: "But you would not give your friend away; I know him too." And after a short silence she continued: "You live in the same direction as myself, Jacques told me; will you wait for me and see me home?"

She had disappeared into her dressing-room and closed the door before I could find an answer for her. How displeased I felt with myself! What contradictory sentiments I experienced in the theatre lobby, which was filled to overflowing with the departing audience! One must be twenty-three and have a romantically tortured soul as Camille's eyes showed she had to add to the exhausting emotions of the stage those of the conversation she was prepared to have with

me. How I feared that talk! How I regretted not making some excuse and leaving her! How sure I was, in spite of her words upon the duty of friendship, that this passionate child would try to make me say something I did not want and ought not say! It would have been better perhaps if this fear had been verified and the profligate had appeared in her at once beneath the lover. But do I sincerely regret the strange minutes of that night? Do I regret that walk beneath the cold and starry January sky, unexpected as it was, for at seven o'clock that evening I did not know this young woman even by name; it was so innocent, almost foolish, too, since I was the extemporized diversion of her love for another; it was so short, too, as the walk from the Vaudeville to the Rue de la Bareuillère does not take more than three quarters of an hour. Those three quarters of an hour count for me among the rare gleams of light in my dark and sorrowful life. Nothing but evoking its last charm would be worth the trouble of beginning the tale of this long and monotonous suffering.

Although I was quite sure that Camille had not kept me to play the scene between La Camargo and the priest in *Les Marrons du Feu*, by the wonderful Musset, described so foolishly by Molan as a bad poet, my heart beat faster than usual when the dressing-room door opened. The actress reappeared enveloped in a large black cloak with a big cape at the shoulders. A thick black silk ruff was around her neck, and her head, on

which she wore a dark blue bonnet, looked almost too small as it emerged from her heavy wrap. She appeared to me to be taller and younger. I could at once see by her eyes that she had been crying, and I could tell that she was nervous by the way in which she said good night to her dresser. Then, as she leant upon my arm to descend the staircase, I asked her, thinking I might cheer her by this kindly pleasantry—

"Are you not afraid of being talked about, leaving the theatre like this with a gentleman?"

"Being talked about!" she said with a shrug of her fine shoulders. "That does not worry me. Everybody at the theatre knows that I am Jacques' mistress. I do not conceal the fact, neither does he. He has told you, has he not? Confess!"

"He told me he loved you," I replied,

"No," she said with a pretty, sad smile, which displayed her fine mouth and made a dimple in her pale cheek, "I know him too well to think that. He told you that I loved him, and he was right. All the same, it is good of you to want me to think that he speaks tenderly of me. I repeat to you that I shall be very quiet. I shall not try to question you. After all, this story about Fomberteau is not an impossible one. It would have been very simple though for him to have wished me good-bye first. I had looked forward so to his escort this evening."

We were in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin when she said this, and it was followed by a long silence. Women who love are unconsciously

cruel. But how could I expect her not to regret her lover to me when all her charm was in her spontaneity and the untouched ingenuousness of her nature? Then I began to be in love with her, and this conversation, seen when talking of some one else, enfolded me and intoxicated me with that enchantment of the beloved presence which is in itself a pleasure. The warmth of her arm in mine made my blood flow to my heart. In what a discreet pose this pretty arm leant upon mine, but with a reserve so different from the abandon of love! But her step instinctively kept time with mine. We kept in step as we walked, and this fusion of our movements, by making me feel the light rhythm of her body, revealed to me, too, that though she knew very little of me, she had perfect confidence in me. I experienced extreme pleasure at the sudden intimacy, so complete and so devoid of coquetry; my self-respect had one more idea of humiliation than hers had of pretence over her relations with my comrade. By what mysterious magic of second sight had she divined at once that I would be for her with Molan precisely the advocate she needed, and also that she could express her feelings in my presence in full sincerity?

It is a fact that, in our walk, first along the crowded Boulevards, then through streets becoming quieter and quieter, till we reached the deserted avenues of the Invalides and Montparnesse, our conversation was that of two beings deeply, definitely, and absolutely sure of one another. I

will not try to explain this first strangeness, the prelude and omen of relations in which everything would be anomalous. I, who am as reluctant to receive confidences as to give them, listened to this actress with a passionate insatiable avidity to hear the story of her life. Though her confidences were very singular when addressed to a stranger almost an unknown, I did not think of doubting them, nor of rating them as impudence or acting. But time goes backward and the months which separate us from that hour disappear. The sky of that winter's night again palpitates with its crowd of stars. Our steps, which seem almost joined together, sound upon the empty pavements. Her voice rises and falls in turn with its tender tones. I can hear the music of her voice still. I can feel again the trouble which was at the same time delicious and grievous, with which each of her words filled me: they appeared to me so touching when that dear voice pronounced them. To-day they seem to me cruelly ironical. How life, cruel life, has frozen the fresh sweet flowers of sentiment which opened in this young heart, and how my heart falters when I recall her eyes, her gestures, her smile, and the pretty way she nodded her head as she said—

"Yes, when I can go home with him like this in the evening he knows that I am happy. He knows, too, what it costs me to procure this liberty. Usually mother comes to meet me. Poor mother! If she suspected! Jacques knows how painful

it is to me to lie about little things, more so perhaps than about important matters. The meanness of certain tricks makes one understand better how ugly and wretched deception is. I have to say that my cousin comes to meet me, and tell my cousin too. No, I was not born for this trickery. I love to say what I think and what I feel. At first I did not blush at my life. But for Jacques I should have told my mother everything."

"Does she really suspect nothing?" I asked her.

"No," she said with profound bitterness, "she believes in me. I am the revenge of her life, you see. We were not always as we are now. I can recollect a time when we had a house, carriages and horses, though I was only a little girl then. My father was a business man, one of the largest outside brokers in Paris. You know better than I do what happened: an unfortunate speculation and we were ruined. My stage name is not my father's name, but my mother's maiden name."

"But Jacques has not told me that," I said in such an astonished way that she shrugged her fine shoulders. What disillusion there was already in that sad and gentle gesture which indicated that she clearly judged the man whom she continued to love so much.

"The story was without doubt not sufficiently interesting for him to recollect. It is so commonplace, comprising as it does the death of the unfortunate man who killed himself in a fit of despair. The least commonplace part of the story is that

mother sacrificed her fortune to preserve my father's honour. It is true it was a fortune he had settled upon her and it had come from him. That makes no difference. There are not many women in the world of wealth which Jacques loves so dearly, who would do that, are there ? Every debt was paid, and we are left with an income of 7,000 francs, on which we lived till last year, when I appeared at the Vaudeville."

" How did the idea of going on the stage enter your mind ? " I asked.

" You want a confession," she said, " and you shall have one. Is it possible to say why one's existence turns in this or that direction ? A person would not go out in the street but for the thought of events which lead to a meeting." She smiled as she uttered this phrase which awakened in me a very clear echo. I realized that it was one of those chances which had made me acquainted with her, for the destruction of my peace of mind. She went on—

" If I believe in anything, you see, it is in destiny. Among the few persons we continued to meet was a friend of my father's, a great lover of the theatre. He is dead now. He listened to me one day, without my knowing it, reciting a piece of poetry I had learnt by heart. Our old friend spoke to me of his memory, which was failing him. He advised me to cultivate mine. This little chance shaped my life. He realized that I recited those few verses well. For amusement he gave me others to learn. I was fifteen years old, and

he teated me without any more ceremony than he would his own niece. After my second effort at reciting he had a long conversation with mother. We were poor. We might become worse off still. We had nothing to expect from our relatives, who had been very hard on my poor father. A talent is a livelihood, and to-day the stage is a career like painting and literature. The days of prejudice are past. You can imagine the arguments of the old Parisian and my mother's objections. But the latter could not outweigh the authority our friend had acquired over us by remaining faithful to us. We had been so utterly deserted by our other friends, though perhaps it was partly our own fault. Mother was so proud! The joy I displayed when I was consulted was what finally convinced mother. That was how I first went to a professor and then to the Conservatoire, which I left three years ago with two first prizes. An engagement at the Odéon was followed directly by one at the Vaudeville; and now you know as much as I do about Camille Favier."

"About Mademoiselle Favier," I corrected her, "but not about Camille."

"Ah, Camille!" she replied, releasing my arm as if an irresistible instinct made her recoil. "Camille is a person who has never had much good sense, and now she has still less than she used to have," she added with a melancholy and arch nod of the head, a gesture I always noticed her make in times of emotion.

"Without a doubt I take after my dear father

who had no good sense at all, I have been told, for he married mother for love, and that his brothers, sisters and cousins never forgave. Poor father and poor Camille! But you can see"—she said this with a smile—"that I have no good sense at all by my telling you this after an acquaintance of two hours. I have a theory, however, that friendship is like love, it either comes all at once or not at all."

"In my case you have realized that it has come?" I said to her.

"Yes," she said with almost grave simplicity as she took my arm again and pressed it against her own. "You would like to ask me about my feelings for Jacques? I guessed as much, and you dare not. I should like to explain to you, but I don't know how. As I have begun to tell you everything, I will try. It seems to me that you will not think so badly of me afterwards, and I don't want you to think badly of me. I must go back to the beginning again. I have told you how and why I entered the Conservatoire. It is a curious but not very well-known place where there is everything, from the very good to the very bad, corruption and artlessness, intrigues, youth, exasperated vanity, and enthusiasm. During the years I spent there, this enthusiasm for the stage was my romance. Yes, I had the frenzy and fever for being one day a great actress, and I worked. How I worked! Then as one does not reach the age of eighteen without dreaming, without ears to hear and eyes to see, on the day I left there

you can understand, if I was virtuous it was not the virtue of ignorance. I had seen, I think, as many ugly happenings as I shall see in the course of my life. I shall not be courted more brutally than I was by some of my companions, nor more hypocritically than by some of the professors. I shall not receive more depraved advice than I did then from some of my friends, nor less enchanting confidences. But my environment has never had much influence over me. What I was told went in at one ear and out of the other. I listen to the little inner voice of conscience which speaks to me when I am alone. It was this little voice which whispered to me 'yes' at once when our old friend spoke of the stage. It was the little voice which prevented me succumbing to the temptations by which I was surrounded. Don't you think the counsels of this little voice were very good ones? Think what a task it was for a girl of my age: always repeating words of love, putting the accents of love into my voice, and giving to my face and gestures the expressions of love. At this acting, a woman ends by catching the fever of the parts she plays. A wish to taste on one's own account the sentiments one has tried so often to depict arises. I cannot explain that to you, but without a doubt I was born for the stage, where I cannot play a part without almost becoming that person I represent, and when I have to say to another character

'I feel that I love you,'

you don't know how I sometimes desire to say this sweet caressing phrase on my own account."

"Alas!" I answered her when she was silent, "that is our story to every one. We read of this feeling in books. There is something contagious in a poet's suffering. We imitate them unconsciously, and we are sincere in this imitation. All this once more proves that the heart is a very complicated machine."

"More complicated than you think," she said with a knowing smile, "when it concerns a girl who lives as I lived. I have told you that I was madly enthusiastic over my art. Why did I decide, in my own poor head, that this art is not compatible with the middle-class respectability of a regular existence, and that prosaic and monotonous virtue is the enemy of talent? I don't know how to explain it to you, but it is like this. I was convinced that no one could be a great artiste without passion. Even now I don't think I was wrong. This evening, for example, I acted my last scene as I have never done before. There was nervousness in all my words and gestures. I gave myself up to my part madly! Why? Because I had seen Jacques leave your box and I did not understand. If you only knew what anguish I suffered at the moment I looked at that frightful Madam de Bonnivet's box! How I hate that woman! She is my bad genius and that of Jacques as well. You see, if she had left the theatre before the end of the play with her fool of a husband, I should have thought that she and

Jacques had gone away together; I should have fallen down on the stage. Forgive me, I will go on with my story if it does not weary you. All these romantic, confused and vague sentiments which moved in me while I worked hard at my studies on leaving the Conservatoire, are summed up in a dream at which I beg you not to laugh too much. Yes, all the sorrows and joys of love, all the emotions which must exalt the artiste and make me into a rival of Rachel, Desclée, Sarah Bernhardt and Julia Bartet, I desired to feel for some one whom they would exalt while they exalted me, for a man of genius whom I would inspire in inspiring myself, and who would write sublime plays which I should afterwards act with a genius equal to his own. How difficult it is to clearly describe what one feels! I am searching for a name in the history of the theatre which will explain to you these chimeras more clearly than my poor gossip."

"You would have liked to be a Champmeslè; to meet Racine and create for him '*Phèdre*' after posing to him," I interrupted.

"That is it," she said quickly. "That is it. Yes, Champmeslè and Racine; or Rachel and Alfred de Musset, the Rachel of the supper if she had loved him. Yes. To meet a writer, a poet, who needed to feel before he could write, to make him feel, to feel with him, to incarnate the creations of his talent on the stage, and thus go through the world together, and attain glory together in a legend of love, that was my dream. Do you think

there can be blue enough for the heavens and your pictures in the head of a little actress, who rehearses her part in an old street in the Faubourg Saint Germain by her old mother's side, with imagination as her only stage property? Such a desire is an absurdity, a chimera, a folly. But I thought I could grasp this chimera and realize this folly when chance threw me in the path of Jacques. I should realize it, if he only loved me;" and in a deeply moved voice, with a sigh, she repeated, "if he loved me!"

"But he does love you," I answered her. "If you had heard him speak of you this evening."

"Do not hope to mislead me," she said seriously and sadly. "I know very well that he does not love me. He loves the love I have for him, but how long will it last?"

CHAPTER IV

HOW distinct the least important words of this conversation have remained in my memory with their gay or sad, sentimental or bantering, disabused or tender intonation! I could continue to note down pages and pages of details without weariness. It seems to me, while writing this upon cold mute paper, that the clock has gone backwards and it is once more the time when the conversation ended, too soon for my liking, and we reached the house in the Rue de la Barouillère. I can see myself saying good-bye to Camille before the massive door which a sleepy porter was very slow in opening. I think I can hear the sound of the bell and feel the warmth of her little feverish hand in mine, while I wished her good-bye and she appeared to me, in the light of the moon, like an adorable phantom ever disappearing. She half closes her fine eyes which were heavy with sleep, she bows her head with a smile, she puts her finger to her mouth with a malicious gesture, to remind me to be discreet over the confidences she had entrusted to me. Her little head and long cloak disappeared in the darkness and the door closed with a dull sound.

Unconsciously I listened for a moment longer. I stretched out my hand to clasp hers and felt instead a metal object, the lamp which was left for her every evening. A match was struck, a hasty step sounded, and another door, the staircase door, closed. That was all, so I went towards home in the pale moonlight along streets deserted except for a few stray cats and dogs, a few policemen on their beats, a belated cab, and a group of young artists just leaving a café in the Boulevard Saint Michel, which were the only things which testified to the existence of life in the great sleeping mansions, dark convents, the little houses with a single jet of gas burning, and the black, sinister-looking hospitals. This quarter is really one of the suburbs of Paris, though it is so near the densely populated Boulevards, just as Camille's peaceful life with her mother is so near her passionate stage life.

It had only taken us three quarters of an hour to return from the theatre, though our pace was unequal, sometimes slow and sometimes rapid, as if we were hastening over our confidences. It took me less time to reach the little house on the Boulevard des Invalides where I live, though I wandered aimlessly in this deserted part overwhelmed by a trouble for which I could scarcely blame myself. That sudden burning of the inner being, that handling and interminable repetition of phrases which one has just heard, that obsession of thought at the same time pleasing and terrifying, that occupation as if by force by a creature to whom one was the previous evening and the same day a

perfect stranger—these are the signs which denote the fatal fever, malaria of the soul, which takes longer to cure than other and more dangerous maladies.

"A good night's sleep," I said to myself, "and to-morrow these foolish ideas will be gone; besides she is a friend's mistress. I know myself. The thought of their caresses simply would prevent me from becoming amorous of her, if I desired to. But I shall not have this desire. She has moved me this evening in her real life as she moved me at the theatre, as she would have moved me in a novel. But that is pure imagination. To-morrow I shall not think of her, and if I think of her, I shall not see her nor Molan again. That is all."

Pure imagination is an expression easily used. But is there not a profound and very sensible point by which this imagination touches our heart, is our heart in fact? When a woman's grace has wounded this point, we always discover motives why we should not remain faithful to the prudent programme of not seeing her again. The fact was, I began by not having the good night's sleep I promised myself, and when I awakened from my morning doze I thought of Camille Favier with as much troubled interest as I had done the evening before. I at once found a pretext for breaking my good resolution not to see either her or Molan again. Had I not promised Jacques to inform him as to the success or otherwise of his scheme? All the same, it was not without remorse that about ten o'clock I set out to fulfil my strange mission.

I had forgotten the previous evening that I had a model coming at ten. A girl called Malvina came to pose for my never-ending "Psyché pardonnée." When I sent her away I heard the little inner voice, of which on the previous evening Camille had prettily spoken, whisper: "Coward! Coward!" But even without the little voice, did not the presence of this creature demonstrate to me the absurdity of my incipient sentiment? Malvina had, too, like Camille, the ideal head for the primitive Madonna, and she was pleasure personified. Her mouth, which looked so beautiful in its silent smile, only opened to retail obscenity. What a good plan it is never to believe in the bewitching charm of a face! Fate has warnings like this for us which we disregard with an obscure feeling of the irreparable. After Malvina had gone I looked round my studio, at the unfinished canvas, my colour box, my palette, and I went out pursued by their mute reproach. Why did I not listen!

To reach the Rue Delaborde, where Jacques Molan lived, I had fortunately to traverse a nice part of Paris, of the sort to distract my attention. I know it so well from making numerous studies of it when I was preoccupied, as the critics say when they are looking on our pictures for an opportunity to theorize and be modern. That is finished as far as I am concerned. It has profited me all the same; for if I no longer think a picture ought to represent freaks of light without significance, or bodies of human life without essential value, I have kept for these studies a keener taste, a more refined

sense of certain landscapes, those of the Seine, for example, the Tuileries, and the Place de la Concorde. I love them especially in their morning tints which give them a tender freshness, distinct water-colour transparencies, with a thrill of alert activity. That morning, though my nerves were still quivering with the intoxication of my new-born passion, the water of the river seemed to me fresher than ever ; the grey-blue of the sky more delicate above the leafless trees ; the water of the fountains more sparkling with a whiter and more noisy foam. My over-excited being more readily appreciated the charm of the trees, houses, and flowing water. I unconsciously forgot my wise resolution and my remorse at leaving my work, to picture to myself the renewal of the soul which a liaison such as the one satiated Jacques Molan held so cheaply would instil into me. Then the irresistible demon of irony took possession of me.

" Yes," I actually or almost said to myself, " what a dream it would be to be loved by a woman like Camille ! Just free enough to give long hours to her lover and not free enough to absorb his time ; enough of an artist to understand the most delicate and subtle shades of impression ; natural enough to be amused at the Bohemian caprices, which are so savoury when they are not accompanied by misery ; enthusiastic enough for a constant encouragement to work to emanate from her, and too spontaneous, too sincere to ever drive you to that slavery to success, which is the fatal influence of so many mistresses and wives. And then what

an adorable lover she would be! Was it a rare tint of soul, which the story she told me yesterday had, and was it different from the ones in the heads of her little friends? A rich protector and much advertisement is the usual ideal of such girls! The only actress who thinks differently must needs meet with Molan, the cold machine for producing prolific copy. But what is the use of my understanding and appreciating her like this, when I am on my way to contribute to the closeness of their intimacy? What absurd chance made me meet Jacques yesterday evening? That must happen to me: it is the symbol of our whole lives, his and mine. I am, or rather am ready to be, the man who really loves; he is the lover. I have the sensibility of a real artist, while he achieves works and reaps the glory of them. Meanwhile I am wasting a very clear morning and my picture is at a standstill. Ah, I shall soon be back and I will send for Malvina. I will work all the afternoon, I will make up for lost time. Directly my commission is executed I will hurry away. I am rather curious to see how the animal is lodged. He must be making just now from 80,000 to 100,000 francs a year, and it is a great change from his former position."

It was a long time since I had called upon my old friend. While the lift-man whisked me up to the second floor, where he lived, of a large new house with bow windows of coloured glass, I recalled the numerous quarters where I had known this author, who was such a clever administrator of his wealth and talents, and ran over in my mind his rapid

advance along the highway of Parisan glory. First of all on leaving college he had a little furnished room in the Rue Monsieur le Prince. A portrait of Baudelaire by Félicien Rops and a few bad medallions by David constituted the personal furniture of this retreat. The fastidious arrangement of the books, papers and pens on the table already testified to the worker's strong will.

Jacques' only resource then was a small income of 150 francs a month allowed him by his only relative, an old grandmother, who lived in the Provinces, and to whom he behaved like a grateful grandson. I saw him weep real tears when she died, and then he put her into a book. Strange to say, that was the only one of his books which was really bad. Could it be that talent of writing is only nourished by imaginative sensibility, which, to be realized, has need of expression, whereas real sensibility exhausts itself and comes to an end through its own reality ? Happily for him, in the early years of his literary life he only depicted sentiments which he had not. His first volume, so elegant and yet so brutal, was, strange to say, scrawled in this Latin Quarter garret. His joining the staff of a Boulevard paper and a change of residence showed that the writer did not intend to vegetate in the same narrow circle. He took rooms in the Rue de Bellechasse still on the left bank of the river, but now very close to the right bank. The portrait of Baudelaire still remained, to proclaim his fidelity to his early artistic convictions ; but now it was framed in velvet and hung

upon red Adrianople tapestry, which gave to this retreat an air of a padded shelter. This counterbalanced the lack of artistic character in the furniture, which was on the hire system and very solid and commonplace, without any other pretension than the quality of its old oak. The noted trader in literary wares, which Molan was, betrayed himself by his choice of durable furniture and a well made desk never likely to need repair. His success still increased, and the period of the little house at Passy came, though directly afterwards the house became unsuitable.

Jacques had not been there eighteen months when the opulent and final abode of the successful man took its place. The anteroom where I was received by a little page in livery was sufficient to convince me. A commissionaire, whom I seemed to have seen stationed in my own neighbourhood, was in attendance. I was shown into a large smoking-room which adjoined a small study and contained a case full of rare curios, consisting of old Chinese lacquer-work, admirable sixteenth century bronzes, polished boxes, statuettes from Saxony, and old sweetmeat boxes. The dissimilarity of the objects expressed Molan's utilitarian ideas. He studied the possibility of sale in case of misfortune. A few pictures decorated the walls, but they were all modern with the most excessive and extravagant modernity. Paintings by an obscure contemporary sometimes turn out a good investment, for he may be a Millet or a Corot. It is a ticket in a lottery, but the prize is a good one. Molan

bought these pictures for a few pounds from young painters in distress, and received them as a return for a little advertisement.

But it was necessary to know him as I knew him to understand the use of this smoking-room, which was destined by the fashionable author for show, for interviews and receptions. Its significant feature was order, implacable, studied and fastidious order. Everything displayed this order, but most of all the arrangement of the books on the book-shelves. The books themselves were all the work of young colleagues, who would be flattered by seeing their works bound in colours appropriate to their talents, the colourists in red, the elegists in mauve, and the stylists in Japanese paper. The brilliant new silver articles, the freshness of the Havanna carpet and many other little things showed the eye of a master difficult to please, whose wishes extended to the smallest detail without ever being satisfied. The conversation that the author had with me the previous evening concerning his investments came back to my mind, and I thought he had told me the truth. He himself entered, manicured, shaved, with keen eyes, a fresh colour, and wearing the most delightful lounge coat that ever a tailor of genius had made for a man about town. He had in his hand a quill pen which he showed me before throwing it into the fire, saying—

"Have I kept you waiting? I had to finish my third page. If I do one page more by half-past twelve I shall have done my day's work. Four

pages a day, whether it is a novel or a play, is my method," and pointing out to me a long row of books not so tastefully bound as the others: "And that is the result."

"Can you leave and resume your work when you please?" I asked him.

"When I like. It is force of habit, you see. I have regulated my brain as a gas meter is regulated. Does the comparison scandalize you? You have, as I have done, meditated upon these words of a great master: 'Patience is that which in man most resembles the proceeding which nature employs in her creations.' Almost automatic regularity is the secret of talent! But let us talk of your errand last evening to Camille. There was much weeping and gnashing of teeth, was there not?"

"Not at all," I replied, rather pleased at being able to disconcert his fatuity; "she did not even question me in order not to make me tell lies."

"Yes," he said with a shrug of the shoulders, "that delicacy is just like her. We live in an amusing time. You meet with a woman of exquisite sentiment, and a delightfully fine heart. She turns out to be a poor little actress. Another woman with an income of 200,000 francs, coming of a good family, bearing a famous name, beautiful, and with a position in society, is a bad actress. But if the little one is romantic, she is shrewdly romantic. She had scruples about making you speak, so as not to ask you to betray a friend. Then she turned to the right place to learn the

truth. She sent an express message to Fomberteau this morning."

"Did you not foresee that?"

"I reckoned on calling upon her when I went out. She was too quick for me. Fomberteau sent her this reply," and he took a piece of paper from his pocket. "Imagine Camille as she read this"—

"'Dear friend, I had no duel to fight. Your Jacques therefore was not my second. Except that, all the rest is true. Set your mind at rest regarding both of us, and as it is press day please excuse me from coming in person to thank you for your kind anxiety.' To this Camille has added a postscript: 'As you gave me an explanation yesterday which was not true, I have the right to another one, the true one, and I am waiting for it.'"

"What time did you get this letter?" I asked him.

"About twenty-five minutes ago. The messenger is waiting. I wanted to see you and know what she said to you. She has lost nothing by waiting. I am going to reply to her in my best style."

"I should be curious," I said, "to know by what new scheme you will excuse yourself."

"I!" he replied as he sat down at a little table and began to write, "by none. I am telling her that I have not the least explanation to give her, and I do not wish her to allow herself another time to play tricks upon me as she did when she sent to Fomberteau."

"You will not do that," I interrupted him

quickly. "The poor girl loves you with all her heart. She could not bear the doubt. She thought you were lying to her and she wanted to know the truth. Come, is not that natural? Had she not the right? Be just. It is so simple to find another excuse. Rather tell her the truth as she asks for it; it will, too, be less trouble."

"There is only one slight objection," Jacques replied as he fastened the note, rang the electric bell to summon the messenger, and gave it to him, "and it is that I should be perfectly happy if Camille quarrelled with me. That is, too, another principle as absolute as the regularity of work. When a man wishes to break with his mistress, the more insignificant the motive the better. My progress is so good in the other direction that I don't need her any longer to urge on her rival. As you are my 'beater,' and I know that you are as silent as a tomb, I will tell you everything in spite of those noble phrases about discretion, more especially as up to the present this confidence only compromises me. Last evening I obtained an appointment from Madam de Bonnivet. You would never guess the place though, not in a thousand times. At Père Lachaise, before the tomb of Musset like the other girl. You don't think that is very grand, do you? From the cemetery to the carriage is like the sublime to the ridiculous, and it is only one step, and from the carriage to a place of my acquaintance is the programme and only another step. For you know one never ought to take a woman to one's own home. Under these circumstances

Camille quarrels with me, so much the better! But don't look at me as if you would like to say: 'My dear Molan, you are a monster.'"

If I had still doubted the keen sentiment inspired in me by the charming Camille, the doubt would have been swept away by the cruel emotion I experienced at this cynical speech. I could see the reality of the drama in which I was concerned as a witness; as in some duels the sight of a life very dear to him in danger makes the second paler than the duellist, Little Favier's passionate love served Jacques as an attack upon the vanity of the *blasé* woman of the world who was coquettish and coldly perverse without doubt, but also elegant, envied and rich, and afterwards whom his vanity and curiosity attracted. The heart of the poor little actress which had remained naïve and romantic in spite of his disenchanting existence, her true heart—which I had felt to be so true, which had opened with such spontaneity in an hour of inward suffering—was about to be broken, torn and crushed between two prides fighting one against the other—and what prides they were!

This most ferocious and implacable of all prides, that of an almost great lady and an almost great author, both gangrened with egoism by their habitual display, was withered by their constant and detestable study of the effect produced, without which a person does not retain the world's uncertain prestige. By frightfully certain intuition, I at once measured the depth of the abyss in which my friend of the previous evening unknown

to herself was plunged. The extreme clearness of this vision prevented me answering Jacques with indignation, as he no doubt expected and was prepared to amuse himself at my simplicity. He would have chaffed me, and that would have annoyed me. He would have told me in words what his enigmatic smile expressed. "If she pleases you so there is a place for you to take at once as her consoler. I can give myself the credit for not using that ugly expression. But I lay claim to no other merit. Is there any merit in not profaning in oneself an image which only pleases when it is tender and pure? Strange though it may seem to apply this word to a girl whom I knew to be the mistress of one of my comrades, I respected in Camille that foolish illusion by which her twenty-two years risked on a single card their precious treasure of delicate dreams, naïve tenderness and noble chimeras. I respected in her the dream which she had already made me dream.

During that conversation last evening, the inmost depths of my melancholy had trembled at the thought that had I met her a little sooner, before she gave herself to Molan, understood and pleased her, perhaps this unreasonable and touching child would have turned to me in her need to take up with another artist those ancient and ridiculed parts of muse and inspirer. What maker of beauty, however, has not sighed for the presence near him of a charming woman's mind, of a dear and devoted face from which to drink in courage in times of lassitude, of two weak but

steady hands to clasp in his own weary ones, or a faithful shoulder on which to rest his weary brow. It was enough to have associated this sigh of regret for some minutes with the name of Jacques' mistress for the hope of a common and spiteful adventure with this poor girl not to need dismissing. But the fact of my not nourishing a dirty gallant project did not prevent my sympathy, which was already unhealthy, growing during this talk with my comrade. That is why instead of writing to Malvina the model, according to the wise plan formed a few hours before, I followed my illogical visit of the morning by one still more illogical in the afternoon, and that imprudent day terminated by a third also foolish visit. An attack of irrationality was beginning. It is not over yet as my pen trembled in my hand at recording Jacques' brutal phrases. On the point of setting down the details of these two other episodes which finished the prologue of this private tragedy, I had to put down the pen. I had a pain in my memories, just as a person suffers from a badly-closed wound. Nevertheless, by a contradiction which I suffered without being able to explain, a charm arises from these sorrowful souvenirs, a magic and an attraction.

The second visit I paid was, as can easily be guessed, to the poor Blue Duchess herself, as I had begun to call her in my heart ; and I forgot the pedantic reminiscence which had inspired Jacques Molan with this name, in making it convey the tender grace, and the fantastic melancholy of

one of Watteau's dreams which are chimerical and caressing, ideal and voluptuous. There was certainly no more difference between the sentimentalism which this pretty child had ingenuously confessed to me on the previous evening, and the practical materialism of her lover, than between the sumptuous new house in the Place Delaborde and the third floor in the modest Rue de la Barouillère where I rang about two o'clock. The faded tints of the badly painted front harmonized with the sordidness of the hall, and the glacial chill of the uncarpeted wooden staircase, the dirty stairs of which sloped towards the street. An air of shabby mediocrity extended over the old building, and the common visiting cards nailed to the doors, at which I was curious enough to look, revealed what sort of tenants dragged out their existence there. These poor houses abound in the old streets near the Faubourg Saint Germain, and as the highest rent is 1,200 francs they are the last haven open to all the waifs of humble middle-class virtue. While I listened to the bell and the sound of approaching footsteps all my impressions were moved at this evidence of sentimental analogy which touched me still more. I wished to discover in the fact that the already well known actress continued to live here a proof that she had not lied to me when she spoke of her mother's and her own peaceful life, an obvious sign of a total absence of vanity and an indisputable evidence of her pride. If she had ceased to be modest, she had not sold herself for luxury. She had given

herself to love and adoration. Alas! I was very quickly to learn that the temptation for great Parisan elegance, too natural to a fine young creature when she has known and lost it, still composed one of the elements of the moral drama which was being enacted in her.

While these thoughts were in my mind the door opened. An old servant, very simply dressed, after some hesitation told me she would see if the ladies were at home and showed me into a little drawing-room. It was full of furniture, too full in fact. If I had raised the covers from the furniture I should have seen that the quality of the upholstery and the gilded wood betokened former opulence. A beautiful tapestry covered one of the walls. It had been necessary to double it up to adapt it to the size of the room, the ceiling of which I could almost reach with my cane. The grand piano, the great bronze clock, and the too lofty candelabra had also come from a financier's mansion. These mute witnesses of vanished splendour told by their presence alone of the melancholy of the ruin with more eloquence than any phrases could do. Besides, I had scarcely time to meditate upon what Claude Larcher, in his evil days of pedantry, had called the psychology of this furniture before a woman of about fifty entered the drawing-room. I could see at a glance that she was Camille's mother.

Madam Favier at an interval of a quarter of a century resembled her child with a similarity of features which became almost sad in its aging and

deformation. There is something very sorrowful in finding oneself face to face with the anticipated spectre of a fine young beauty, whom one admires and is beginning to love. Still the mother's and daughter's expression were so different that the likeness was at once corrected. Just as Camille's blue eyes, with their pupils in turn very clear or very dark, very animated and very languishing, revealed a passionate inequality of soul, and profound troubles, so did the peaceful and sluggish azure of Madam Favier's eyes tell of passive serenity, resigned acceptance, and above all happiness. This woman, the widow of the stock-broker, whose life ended in a tragedy, was the image of internal peace. Seeing her as I saw her, a little fat, with the fresh colour of health in her full cheeks, and if not elegant at any rate very tasteful in a dress which was almost fashionable, it was impossible at first to imagine that this woman had endured the trials of a drama, of ruin and suicide, and that this tranquil and irreproachable dowager was simply an actress' mother.

But we have changed all that, as my friend used to say. Did I myself look like a painter who believed in the ancient traditions, or did my comrades? Does the aspiring clubman, dressed like a tailor's fashionplate as Jacques Molan, look any more like Henry Murger's Bohemians? But do we not live in the days when a successful play brings in an income for years equal to the capital and revenue of a farm in Beauce, when the portrait of an American brings in 15,000, 20,000, or 30,000

francs, and when an associate of the Comédie Française draws the salary of an Ambassador before retiring with the red ribbon in his buttonhole, while actresses on tour abroad are received at monarch's receptions. The barrier of prejudices or principles which separated the artistic life from the world of society has been broken down, to the applause of the democrats and progressives ? The example of Jacques and my studies have convinced me that it is on the contrary one of the worst errors of the period. The artist has always gained by being treated almost like an outcast. His natural taste for the brilliant, which is the inevitable ransom of his powers of imagination, so soon turns to vanity when it is the dupe of decorum, luxury and the praises of the smart woman in particular, which is also a flattery irresistible to his self-respect and senses ! When he does not succumb to the temptation, he goes to the other excess, quite as natural to this irritable class and no less dangerous, that of revolted and misanthropic pride.

But I am falling into a great failing of mine, that of indefinite and never-ending reverie. Let us go back to that which remains the true corrective of all vices, intellectual and otherwise, " Reality." So I was sitting facing the respectable Madam Favier, in the drawing-room with its covered up furniture, with a rather sheepish look at finding myself with the mother when I had come to see the daughter. The widow, however, soon reassured me as she entertained me with commonplace conversation suitable to her appearance and birth.

I have found out since that she was the daughter of a small business man in the north, and had been married for her beauty by the romantic father of the romantic Camille after a chance meeting.

"Camille is coming directly," she said to me. "The dressmaker is with her trying a dress on. The poor child is not very well to-day. Her profession, sir, is a very trying one, and she wants a rest already. We were wrong not to go to the seaside this year. Do you know Yport, sir? It is very pretty, and very quiet, but we have been there six summers. I like, when I go into the country, to go to a familiar place. You are so much better treated if you do, and feel more at home. When my dear husband was alive we spent two months every year in Switzerland. We always went on July 16 and came back on September 15. I have never been there since, for it would bring sad memories back to my mind. Have you come to talk to Camille about her portrait?"

"Has she spoken about it to you then? She has not forgotten?" I said.

"No, certainly not," her mother answered, "and I was very pleased and astonished when she told me, for it is very difficult to get her to sit for her portrait. Did you think of showing Camille's portrait at the annual exhibition of pictures? It will be an excellent thing, I think, for you, and not bad for her. We are waiting, before moving back to our old neighbourhood where we have a few friends, till Camille has signed a definite engagement. The Théatre-Français

has offered her one, but as they let her go after she had won two prizes, she has been advised to make them pay her a large salary now she is famous. I am willing for her to do so ; but I tell her that the house of Molière is to the other theatres what a great shop like the Louvre or the Bon Marché is to one belonging to a small retailer."

I am not quite sure I am reproducing these phrases in their right order. But on looking at them I am very sure of their tenor, and more so still of the mind which inspired them, as well as the phrases which followed. Poor Madam Favier was so simple as to be sometimes almost common, and so trusting as to be almost loquacious. Her mind was a very solid and sensible one and that of a woman who had retained her good sense through her ruin. This phenomenon is rarer even than sentiment in an actress. Usually these sudden falls from the Olympus of opulence have as a result a moral bewilderment which last for the rest of life. Ruined people seem to lose with their money every faculty of adaptation to the narrow circle of activity in which their social downfall imprisons them. It is particularly so when their wealth has only been an episode between two periods of poverty.

This alternation of situations is like a phantasmagoria in which judgment is warped. To have withstood such a shock Madam Favier must have been absolutely, as her youthful smile, her fresh cheeks, and the harmonious lines of her face showed

her to be, a simple creature tranquil in her positivism, and quite the opposite of this girl whose future she foresaw as she would have foreseen the future of a son who had joined the army. Her steps from the Conservatoire to the Odeòn, Vaudeville and Comédie Française were fixed in this good woman's mind with a regularity which was the more astonishing because her education had been such as to make her think of another type of destiny for a woman. How had such a revolution been accomplished in her mind? Is it necessary to explain that there are certain natures whose primordial instinct is to model themselves on circumstances, just as the instinct of others is to struggle and rebel against them? The latter case was that of the poor Blue Duchess. This essential diffrence between their two characters had prevented any real intimacy between the two women. They had not and could not have real intercourse. I realized this only too well when after ten minutes conversation with her mother, I saw Camille enter with a pale face and eyes red from weeping, for her trouble was so obvious, and yet her mother never even suspected it!

"It is your turn to try on now, mother," she said. "We will wait for you. M. la Croix has a few minutes to spare us I am sure." But when the good lady had shut the door she said "Have you seen Jacques?"

"I called on him this morning," I replied.

"Then you know that I am aware of everything?"

"I know you wrote to Fomberteau," I replied evasively.

"You know, too, your friend's answer, when I asked for an explanation of his deception? He has sent you to find out for him what impression his infamous note has produced upon me? Now, confess that is so, it will be more straightforward."

"Why do you judge me to be like that, mademoiselle?" I said, displaying grief which she could see was sincere, for she looked at me in astonishment, while even I was surprised at my own words: "You were more just to me. You understand that sometimes silence is neither an approbation nor a complicity. It is true that Jacques did not conceal his sorry scheme nor his note from me. I did not hide from him what I thought of his harshness, and if I come here it is of my own accord, under the impulse of a sympathy which I admit I have no right to feel. We have only been friends for twenty-four hours and yet I feel that sympathy. You spoke to me with such a noble outpouring of the heart, with such touching confidence that henceforth, I thought, we cannot be strangers. I felt that you were unhappy and I came to you simply and naturally. If it was an indiscretion you have thoroughly punished me for it."

"Forgive me," she said in different tones with an altered look as she stretched out her little burning hand to me. "I am suffering and that makes me unjust. I, too, though I hardly know you, feel too keen a sympathy for you to doubt yours. But this note from Jacques has wounded me and

he really has gone too far. He knows that I love him and he thinks he can do as he pleases with me. He is mistaken. He does not know where he is hurling me by playing with my heart in the way he is doing!"

"Do not be enraged at what is only a burst of anger in him," I said, full of apprehension. "You wrote to Fomberteau. For the moment Jacques was wounded. He wrote most unkindly to you, but I am sure he regrets it by this time."

"He?" she cried with a nasty laugh. "If you are saying what you think, you hardly know him. That which causes me the most pain, please understand me, is not what he has done to me, though that makes me suffer cruelly, it is what he pretends to himself to be from the idea I had of him. I put him so high, so high! I saw in him a being apart from others, some one rare, as rare as his talent! Yet I find him like the lovers of all my theatre companions, the worst of their lovers, those who have not even the courage of their infidelities and conceal them by girlish untruths, those to whom the love given to them is nothing more than vanity, a woman's sentiment to be put in the button-hole like a flower. But come, my passion blinds me no longer. That rends me, and he, who is so intelligent, does not even suspect the nature of my suffering. Don't you think that I guessed that creature Madam de Bonnivet invited him to supper last evening, or else to see her home, or worse still? We know what fashionable women are when they once begin. We have about us

the same men as they do, and they tell us their stories. They are sometimes haughty wretches ; and Jacques accepted her invitation because she has a house, horses, pictures, dresses by Worth, 50,000 franc necklaces, and 30,000 franc furs. But I, too, some day when I like, will have luxury since that is what pleases this great writer with the soul of a snob. I have only to accept Tournade as my lover, the big fellow with a face like a coachman whom you saw in my dressing-room, and I shall have a house as good as Madam Bonnivet's barrack, diamonds, dresses by Worth, carriages and horses. I will have them, I will have them, and he shall know it. He will be the man who has turned me into a kept woman, a courtesan, and I will tell him so and shout it after him. Do you think I dare not ? "

" No, you will not dare," I replied ; " even to say it raises a feeling of disgust in you."

" No," she replied in a dull voice, " you must not think me better than I really am. There are days when that glittering life tempts me. I have been rich, you see. Up to the age of twelve or thirteen I was surrounded by all the luxuries it was possible for a father making 100,000 francs a year on the Stock Exchange to give his only daughter. Ah well, at times I miss that luxury. The mediocrity of this drab, vulgar and commonplace existence disgusts and oppresses me. When I am waiting for a tram with a waterproof and overshoes to save a cab fare of 35 sous, I sometimes get impatient, and those tempting words, ' If you

liked,' come into my mind. Ah! when I have a soul full of happiness, when I can think that I love and am loved, that I am realizing and carrying out the romance of my youth, that Jacques clings to me as I do to him, and that I shall remain mingled in his life and work, then it is an intoxication to answer myself: 'If I liked? But I do not like.' I smile at my beloved poverty because it is my beloved chimera. But when I have terrible evidence, as I did to-day, that I am the dupe of a mirage, that this man has no more heart than the wood of this furniture"—and she struck with her clenched fist the table upon which she was leaning while she talked to me—"then I make a different reply to the temptation. 'If I liked?' I repeat and I reply: 'It is true, and I am very foolish not to like!' I shall not always be so."

"You will always be so," I said as I took her hand again, "because this foolishness simply consists in having what you believe Jacques has not, I mean a heart. But then he has one of a sort," I added, "and you will be of that opinion this evening or to-morrow morning."

"You do not know me," she replied with a frown upon her pretty forehead and a tremor of hatred around her fine mouth, which had become bitter again. "He will have to humble himself and wait days and days for his pardon. Yesterday you only saw me as the weak and amorous woman. There is another side to my character, the bad side. You will find it out. There is another characteristic, too, pride; but don't be any the less

my friend," she went on, introducing a subtle touch of melancholy into her anger. The grace of this sudden change of front brought the shadow of a sad smile to her face. She wiped away with her handkerchief two large tears, and added with a shrug of the shoulders in a childish tone which contrasted graciously, too, with the tragic discourse which had just preceded it: "I hear mother coming back. I don't want her to see that I have been crying. As I am ashamed of lying to her, let us do so thoroughly."

What a conversation this was for a man to hear who, as I, since the previous evening, had been invaded by the most passionate interests, and by an emotion so keen that it was real love! During the hours of that afternoon of confidences I could do nothing but ask myself: "Was she sincere? Would it be possible for despair to make her take that horrible course?" I could see in my mind that fat Tournade, and the gleam of the eyes of that horrible being standing out from his red face. I discerned now on reflection a will I had not realized on the previous evening, that of the rich and patient rake who is weary of play and fastens himself upon a particular woman. At the same time I could see Jacques Molan as I had left him that morning, and his look when he had spoken of his scheme for a rupture. But it was impossible that he could suspect the responsibility he was incurring. I tried to demonstrate to myself that there was more affectation than real perversity in his nature as a literary man and that

it was inoffensive. It is always childish for a man to make such a parade of himself, even when, as in his case, it was diplomatic and calculated. Was he not better than his attitudes and paradoxes ? Who knows ? In telling him simply and frankly my impression of the evil he could do this poor girl, should I not touch in him a chord of remorse ? There is, however, a sentimental honour, a probity, trivial but strictly accurate, in affairs of the heart, as there is professional honour and probity in money matters. How many people anarchists in theory recognize in practice this pecuniary probity ! They preach the suppression of inheritance, and they would not rob you of a farthing in a business transaction. Why had not Jacques too a fund of scruples and probity in the presence of an obviously bad action to be committed or not ?

This reasoning resulted, after weighing the pros and cons, after resolving to speak to him and then proving to myself the ridiculousness of doing so, in my once more, about six o'clock, crossing the threshold of his house in the Place Delaborde, only to discover that Molan was not there. I went to dinner hoping to meet him as I had done the previous evening ; I did not do so. Seeing the impossibility of meeting him, I wanted at least to have another talk with the woman who had been the cause of my fruitless search, the seductive Camille Favier, whose frail silhouette, blue eyes and emotional smile, pursued me with an obsession much more irresistible than my pity justified. That was the pretext I found as I made my way to

the Vaudeville. I reached the theatre even before the end of the first act. My weakness inflicted upon me a feeling of shame, which made me hesitate about entering. I can see myself now walking round the entrance, first of all looking at the staircase leading to the theatre and then at the stage door in the Chaussée d'Antin. At last I made up my mind to enter by the latter door, and as I did so the audience were coming out in the interval. I ran up against Jacques himself.

"Are you going to see Camille?" he asked with a heartiness through which I discerned malice, and I believe I blushed as I replied—

"No, I am running after you."

"You have come to plead her cause, I am sure," he said as he took my arm. "I know you had a talk with her this afternoon and even defended me. I thank you, for it would have been quite legitimate for you to try and profit by the situation. Only you are an honourable man. The cause is won and we are so reconciled, your friend and I, that to-morrow she is coming to visit me in my 'Abode of Love,' as your friend Larcher calls it."

"What of Madam de Bonnivet?" I asked him, surprised at this unexpected change of front.

"Madam de Bonnivet is nothing but a simpleton, a woman of the world in all her horror. She kept the appointment at Pére Lachaise. She came there with the intention of making me climb to the top of the yew trees between which we walked. She played the coquette there more coldly than in her own drawing-room. As I don't like to be

laughed at, we separated after what was almost a quarrel."

"So Camille benefits by the desire rejected by the other woman?" I interrupted. "That is what is called a 'transfer' in the money market."

"No, not that," he said as he shook his head. "A man's heart is more complicated than that. After seeing Madam de Bonnivet to her carriage, for she had the audacity, or if you prefer it, the precaution, to come to the rendezvous in her private carriage, I told her in English the astonishing phrase Lord Herbert Bohun used to Madam Ethorel when he had the audacity to make a declaration to her on his second visit, and which is the finest example of insolence and fatuity I know! 'You know I shan't give you another chance.' I raised my hat too tranquilly for the fool to think I was sincere. But I was. I lit a cigar, reaching the Boulevard on foot with a quickness which surprised even myself. I made the discovery that not only I did not love this woman, but that she really displeased me. With her a visit to my bachelor's apartments, the usual theatre of my pleasures, would have been a sport which flattered my vanity without a doubt, but still an unpleasant job. She is, then, quaint and pretentious. Then the image of the other one came into my mind, and this infidelity which I had almost committed against her made her seem adorable by comparison, so adorable that I that once went into a café to write to my pretty Camille a letter of reconciliation. I would have given my

author's fees for that evening for Queen Anne to have seen me, for without a doubt she believed I was in some corner shedding the tears of wounded love and humiliated vanity. That would be like me, would it not ? "

" Did Mademoiselle Favier answer your note ? " I asked.

" A six-page letter which is a masterpiece, just like everything she writes to me—five and a half pages to tell me she would never forgive me, and the last half-page to forgive me. It is a classic ! But where are you going ? I believe you were going to see her."

" I repeat that I was looking for you," I replied. " I have found you, but what I had to tell you you have found out. You are doing her justice and have done so to the other one. Your lover's quarrel is over. You are reconciled and happy. There is nothing left for me to do but bless you."

CHAPTER V

I LEFT Jacques after this jesting remark which I laughed at him with a gaiety sufficiently well simulated for the strange pain I was stifling to escape his irony. Here was my cowardice again, my grievous inconsequence of heart which was always the same in spite of experience, in spite of resolution, and in spite of age! I had run after my friend all the afternoon to beg him not to slight his poor friend by abandoning her so brutally. I had come to the theatre to exhort Camille not to judge her lover as she did, for her possible vengeance had moved me with anxiety to the depths of my soul. I ought then to rejoice at their reconciliation. So much the better if Madam de Bonnivet's coquetry had produced naturally a result which without doubt my counsel would not. But it was not so. The fact of the actress pardoning with the facility of a true lover wounded me in a still unsuspected place, and the thought of their appointment on the morrow was more painful still. I could see them in each other's arms, with the help of that terribly precise imagination which a painter's craft develops in him. This unsupportable vision made me admit the sad truth. I

was jealous, jealous without hope, and the right to be so, with a childish, grotesque and unacceptable jealousy. I was about to enter, I had entered into that hell of false sentiments in which one feels the worst of passion's sorrow without tasting any of its joys. How well I knew that cursed path!

In the course of my love affairs, which were as incomplete and incoherent as the rest of my existence, I had already experienced this dangerous situation more than once. I had been the too tender friend of a woman who was in love with some one else, but never with the sudden emotion, with the troubled ardour in the sympathy which Camille Favier inspired in me. I was afraid, so I concluded a solemn compact with myself. I took my hand and said aloud: "I give my word of honour to myself I will keep my door shut all the week, and I will neither go to see Jacques, nor to the theatre, nor to the Rue de la Barouillère. I will work and cure myself."

Every one in his character has strong points which correspond to his weak ones. The latter are the ransom of the former. My task of energy in positive action is compensated by a rare power of passive energy, if that expression is allowable. Incapable of going forward vigorously, even when my keenest desire urges me on, I am capable of singular endurance in abstention, in abnegation and absence. Telling a woman that I love her stifles me with timidity into thinking that I shall die of it. I have been able to fly with savage energy from mistresses I have passionately adored,

and remain even without answering their letters, though in agonies of grief, because I had sworn never to see them again. To keep my oath as regards Camille was much easier. In fact the week I deemed sufficient for my cure passed without my giving to her or to Jacques any sign of my existence. Neither did the two lovers give me any sign of their existence.

The first part of the programme was completed, but not the second, for the cure did not come. I must say that my wisdom and my actions was not accompanied by equal wisdom in my thoughts. I worked hard, but at what ! I tried at first for forty eight hours to resume my " Psyché pardonnée." I could not become absorbed in it. The smile and the eyes of my friend's mistress ceaselessly interposed between my picture and myself. I put down my brush. I told Malvina Ducras, my stupid model with a common voice and such sad eyes, to take a little rest, and while the girl smoked cigarettes and read a bad novel, my mind went far away from my studio and I could see Camille again. I had read too many books, as my custom was, about this fable of Psyché for it not to make me dream. The idea represented by this story, this cruel affirmation that the soul can only love in unconsciousness, has always appeared to me to be a theme of inexpressible melancholy. Alas ! it is not for matters of love only that the Psyché imprisoned and palpitating in each of us submits to this law of ignorant and obscure instinct. This stern law dominates matters of religion and

matters of art. To believe is to renounce understanding. To create is to renounce reflection.

When an artist like myself suffers from a hypertrophy of the intelligence, when he feels himself intoxicated by criticism, paralysed by theories, this symbol of the cursed and wandering nymph who expiates in distress the crime of wishing to know, becomes, too, too real, too true. It agitates too powerfully cords which are too deep. I always felt myself attracted by this subject, without doubt on account of that, and I have never been able to make a success of the scenes of canvasses on which I have begun to treat the subject. Camille Favier is far away and the "Psyché pardonnée" is still unfinished. I would like to introduce into the picture, too, many tints. But then the slightest pretext has always been and will always be enough to distract me. The clear impression which I retained of Camille was of all these pretexts the most delightful, and the one which least disturbed my craft as a painter, thanks to the strange compromise of conscience which I devised, about which I will tell you.

"As I cannot help thinking of her all day long," I said to myself at last, "suppose I try to paint her portrait from memory? Goethe pretended that to deliver himself from a sorrow, it was sufficient for him to compose a poem. Why should not a painted poem have the same virtue as a written one?" Was not this paradoxical and foolish enterprise, the portrait without a model of a woman seen but twice, the work of a poet? It was paradoxical but not foolish. I had to fix

upon canvas this pale silhouette which haunted my dreams, my first impression of which was so clear that by shutting my eyes I could see her before me just as she appeared—upon the stage, fine and fairylike in her youth and genius beneath her make-up, with the blue costume of her part ; then in her dressing-room, by turns tender and satirical, with the picturesque disorder around her which betrayed the thousand small miseries of her calling ; then along the wall of the Invalides under the stars of that December night, leaning on my arm, pale and magnified as if she were transfigured by the sadness of her confidences ; and last of all at home, tragic and trembling at the deceit practised upon her ? All these Camilles were blended in my mind into an image hardly less clear than her presence itself. I dismissed Malvina. I relegated "*Psyché*" to a corner of the studio, and I made a large red crayon drawing of my phantom. The likeness in this portrait outlined in the fever of a passionate pity was striking. Camille smiled at me from the bluish paper. It was only a sketch, but so lifelike that I was astonished at it myself.

As usual I doubted my own talent, and to verify the fact that this portrait from memory was really successful to this extent, I went to a shop in the Rue de Rivoli where photographs of famous people were for sale. I asked for one of the fashionable actress. They had a collection of six. I bought them with a blush on my face, a ridiculous timidity considering my age, my profession, and the inno-

cence of the purchase. I waited before examining them in detail till I was alone beneath the bare chestnuts in the Tuileries on this overcast autumn afternoon, which accorded well with the nostalgia with which I was seized before these portraits. The most charming of them represented Camille in walking dress. It must have been at least two years old, at a period certainly before she became Jacques' mistress. There was in the eyes and at the lips of this girlish picture a maidenly and somewhat shy expression, the shamefaced nervous reserve of a soul which has not yet given itself—the soul of a child which foresees its destiny and fears it, but desires the mysterious unknown. Two others of these photographs represented the debutante in the two parts she had played at the Odeon. She was the same innocent child, but the determination to succeed had formed a wrinkle between her brows, and there was the light of battle in her eyes; the firm, almost strained fold of the mouth revealed the anxiety of an ambition which doubts itself. The three latter photographs showed in the costume of the Blue Duchess the woman at last born from the child. The revelation of love was displayed by the nostrils which breathed life, and by the eyes in which the flame of pleasure, light and burning, floated; and the mouth had something like a trace, upon its fuller lips, of kisses given and received.

Would another day come when other pictures would tell no more of the romance of the artist and lover, but of the venal slave of gallantry, kept

by a Tournade, by several Tournades, and forever branded by shameless and profligate luxury. But I always went back to the earliest of these photographs, the one I would have desired, had I been able to meet the living model in that same garden of the Tuileries, on her way to the Conservatoire. Now I could think of her only as she had been before her first stain, such as she would never be again!

"Poesy is deliverance"; yes, perhaps, for a Goethe, or for a Leonard, for one of those sovereign creatures who throw all their inner being into, and incarnate it in, a written or painted work. There is another race of artists to whom their work is only an exaltation of a certain inner state. They do not rid themselves of suffering by expressing it, they develop it, they inflame it, perhaps because they do not know how to express it and to entirely rid themselves of it. This was so in my own case. Before these photographs my project for a portrait became praise. I only retained the first one. It was the eighteen-year-old Camille I wished to evoke and paint. It was a phantom, the phantom of her whom I might have known in her purity, as a virgin, might have loved and perhaps married. It was a portrait of a phantom, of a dead woman.

From this task was diffused upon me during the week's seclusion and uninterrupted labour that vague and satisfying delight which floats around a woman's form which has gone for ever. In analysing under the microscope the tiny details

of this face upon this bad and almost faded photograph, I enjoyed for hours a voluptuous and unutterably attractive soul's pleasure. There was not a trait in this ingenuous face in which I did not discover a proof, quite obvious and physiological to me, of an exquisite delicacy of nature in the person, of whom that had been a momentary likeness. The tiny ear with its pretty lobe told of her breeding. Her pale silky hair displayed tints in its ringlets which seemed faded and washed out. The construction of the lower part of the face could be seen to be fine and robust beneath her slender cheeks. There was a shade of sensuality in her lower lip which was slightly flattened and split by the wrinkle which betokens great goodness. There was intelligence and gaiety in her straight nose, which was cut a trifle short in comparison with her chin. But what of her eyes? Her great, clear, profound eyes, innocent and tender, curious and dreamy! As I looked at them, to my overwrought imagination they seemed to be animate. Her little head turned upon a neck, which fine attachment displayed the slenderness of the rest of the body.

I never understood so well as in that period of contemplative exaltation that oriental jealousy which protects their women from the caress of the glance, which is as passionate, as enveloping, and almost as deflowering as the other caresses. To contemplate is to possess. How I felt that during those long sittings spent in putting on to canvas such a real and deceptive mirage as the

smile and eyes of Camille, her smile of the past, and her eyes of to-day lit by ether flames! How I felt, too, that my talent was not in the depths of my soul, since the intoxication of this spiritual possession was not achieved by a definite creature! I have only sketched these days in which I lived and experienced the sensations produced by the achievement of a masterpiece. At least I respected in myself this attack of the sacred fever, and I never again touched, to complete it, the portrait I had drawn in that week. Why was not the period prolonged?

Why? The fault is not alone in my own weakness. A simple incident occurred which did not depend upon my will. It sufficed to dismiss me from the drama of coquetry and real love which I wished to shun, to avoid being the confidant of former tragedies boasted of by Jacques—a confidant himself wounded and bleeding. Because of my troubles during the day following my introduction to the Bonnivets, and during my week's solitary work, I had neglected to call upon them and leave my card. For that reason I felt I was not likely to see Queen Anne again. But that was the quarter from which reached me the pretext to break this period of solitude and work in the ordinary shape of a perfumed note emblazoned and scrawled in the most coquettish and impersonal English handwriting, by Madam de Bonnivet herself. It was an invitation to dine with her and a small party of mutual friends.

The fact that this invitation reached me after

my breach of etiquette proved clearly enough that her quarrel with Jacques had not lasted. The brief notice the dinner was for the following day, showed on the other hand that it was an unexpected invitation. A third fact added an enigmatic character to this note, which was as commonplace as the writing in it! Why had it not reached me through Jacques or with a few lines from him? My first idea was to refuse it. A dinner in town had appeared to me for years an insupportable and useless task. The too numerous family feasts I am constrained to attend, why?—the monthly love feasts of fellow artists which I am weak enough to frequent—why again?—two or three friends who dine with me from time to time—because I like them—the dining-room at the club where I go when I am very bored—these gatherings to a great extent suffice for the social sense which has withered in me with age. I shall end, I think, by only dining out about once in three years.

The dinner to which the beautiful and dangerous Queen Anne had invited me was one the more to be avoided, as it plunged me once more into the current of emotions I had stemmed so resolutely and painfully. I sat down to write a note of refusal, which I put into an envelope and stamped. Then instead of sending the letter to the post, I put it in my pocket to post myself. I called a passing cab, and instead of telling the driver to stop at the nearest post office I gave him Molan's address, Place Delaborde—the house I had sworn

not to enter again. Would there not still be time to send my refusal after finding out from Jacques the reason of Madam de Bonnivet's amiability, about which I could say with Ségur of the promotion of officers, after the battle of Moskwa: "These favours threatened?"

The page showed me this time into the great man's study. Molan was sitting at his writing-table which was of massive oak with numerous drawers in it. Bookcases were all round this little room, and in appearance the volumes were works of reference often used but always put back in their places. There was no dust on them, nor was there any trace of the disorder to be found with the writer-born, whose fancy ceaselessly interrupts his work. A high desk held out an invitation for standing composition. Another bookcase, lofty and revolving, full of dictionaries, atlas, books of reference, and maps stood at the corner of the writing-table; and the order of the latter piece of furniture, with its sheets of paper carefully cut, its stock of useful articles, its place for answered letters and for letters to be answered, demonstrated the methodical habits of work daily allotted and executed. These details of practical installation were too like their owner for a single one to escape me. There was not a work of art to be seen, not even on the mantelpiece, where stood the usual library clock. This timepiece which marked the hours of work was a good, accurate instrument, metallic and clear in its glass and copper case.

What other portrait could one paint of this writer, who was an absolute stranger to anything not his own business, as methodical as if he were not a man of the world, as regular as if he were not, by his art itself, the painter of all the troubles and all the disorders of the human soul, than sitting at his table with his cold and reflective face, and his way of using his pen with a free, measured and regular gesture. To make his portrait really typical it was necessary to paint Molan as I surprised him, engaged in reading the four pages he had written since his awakening that morning—four little sheets covered with lines of equal length in a handwriting every letter of which was properly made, every T crossed and every I dotted. Was I envious as I noted these details with an irritation not justified in appearance? He had the right after all, this fellow, to administer his literary fortune as if it were a house of business. But is there not something in us, almost a sense which this indefinable deception offends: this working of a fine talent, with so much egoism, so much calculation at its base, and so little moral unity between the written thought and the thought lived?

Another mannerism of Jacques' irritated my nerves. He stretched out his hand to me with an indifferent cordiality quite his own. He had been for months without seeing me till we met at the club, and he spoke to me then in as friendly a way as if we had met on the previous day. He had told me about the two adventures he had on hand as if I were his best and surest friend.

Directly I turned on my heel I saw or heard no more of him. I had ceased to exist as far as he was concerned. When I saw him again he greeted me with just the same handshake. How much I prefer, to these smiling and facile friends, the suspicious, the susceptible, and the irritable ones with whom you quarrel, who either want you or do not do so, who often get angry with you, sometimes wrongly and by the most involuntary negligence, but for whom you exist and are real with human living reality! To the real egoists, on the other hand, you are an object, a thing the equal in their eyes of the couch they offer you to sit down upon with their most amiable and empty smile. Your only reality to them is your presence, and the pleasure or the reverse they feel at it. To be entirely frank, perhaps I should have wished Camille's lover to receive me in the way he always had done, with his impersonal graciousness, if I had not found him looking a little pale and heavy-eyed; and I was obliged to attribute this slight fatigue to his love of the charming girl, whose maidenly grace of the past I had just spent a week in evoking, sustained by the most passionate of retrospective hypnotism. This impression was as painful to me as if I had over Camille other rights than those of dream and sympathy. I had really come to talk about her, and I would have liked to depart without even her name being mentioned. This silence was the more impossible as after our greeting I held out to Jacques Madam de Bonnivet's invitation.

"Were you the cause of this being sent to me?" I asked him. "Who will be present at this dinner? What answer shall I give?"

"I?" he said, after reading the letter, unable to conceal his astonishment. "No. I had nothing to do with it. You must accept for two reasons: first because it will amuse you, and then you, by doing so, will be rendering me a real service."

"You a service?"

"Yes. It is very simple," he replied, a little impatient at my stupidity. "You don't understand that Madam de Bonnivet has invited you because she hopes to find out from you my actual relations with Camille Favier? It is a little ruse. As a matter of fact, you have deserted me again and are not up-to-date. But you know me well enough to be sure that I have not let the week pass without manœuvring skilfully in the little war which Queen Anne and myself are waging! I say skilfully, but it is merely working a scheme, the foundation of which never varies. Mine has progressed in the way I told you, by persuading the lady more and more that I have a profound passion for little Camille. There is no need for me to tell you my various stratagems, the simplest of which has been to behave with Camille as if I really loved her. But Queen Anne is clever, and is studying my play. I have only to make one slip and my plan will fail."

"Come. I don't understand you. One fact is that you are courting Madam de Bonnivet. You talk to her about your passion for little Favier;

that is another fact. How do you manage that ? For to pay court to one is not to have a passion for the other ? "

" But, my dear fellow," he interrupted, " you forget the remorse and the temptation. I am not paying court to Queen Anne, I am arranging to do so. Have you ever kept a dog ? Yes. Then you have seen it, when you were at table enjoying a cutlet, look at you and the bone with eyes in which the honest sentiments of duty and the gluttonous appetite of the carnivorous animal were striving for mastery ? Ah, well, I have those eyes for Queen Anne at each new ruse she employs to arouse my desire for her beauty. The man being superior to the dog in virtue, sir, and in self-control, duty carries him away. I leave her quickly like some one who does not wish to succumb to temptation. Stop, shall I give you an illustration ? Take, for example, yesterday ; we were in a carriage in the fog ; it was what I call a nice little adultery fog. Madam de Bonnivet and I had met in a curiosity shop, where she had gone to buy tapestry, and so had I. What luck ! She offered me a lift."

" In her own carriage ? " I asked.

" You would have preferred a public carriage, would you not ? " he asked me. " I do not, for let me tell you that carriage rides are very fashionable. There are innocent and guilty ones. You can imagine us, then, in this small carriage filled with the perfume of woman, one of those vague and penetrating aromas in which a hundred scents

are mingled. Queen Anne and I were in this soft, warm atmosphere. The fog enveloped the carriage. I took her hand, which she did not withdraw. I pressed the little hand, and it returned my pressure. I put my arm around her waist. Her loins bent as if to avoid me, in reality to make me feel their suppleness. She turned to me as if to become indignant, but in reality to envelop me with her staring eyes and madden me. My lips sought her lips. She struggled, and suddenly instead of insisting, I repulsed her. It was I who said: 'No, no, no. It would be too wicked.' I could not do that to her, and made use of the expressions usual to her sex at such times. I it was who stopped the carriage and fled! With a mistress on the other side of Paris, who loves and pleases you, to whom to bring the desire awakened by her rival, this is truly the most delightful of sports. It is very natural that Queen Anne will allow herself to be taken. The feeling that she is passionately desired and at the same time shunned is likely to provoke the worst follies in a woman, who is a little corrupt and a little cold, a little vain and a little curious."

"Then if I have understood you, my part at to-morrow's dinner would consist of lying to the same effect as yourself when Madam de Bonnivet speaks to me of Camille? In that case it would be useless for me to accept the invitation. I will not commit that villainy."

"Villainy is a hard word. Why not?" asked Jacques with a laugh.

"Because I should feel remorse at contributing to the success of this dirty intrigue," I replied, getting quite angry at his laughter. "Whether Madam de Bonnivet does or does not deceive her husband is no business of mine, nor would it concern me if either of you injured yourself through the villainous game you are playing. But when I meet real sentiment, I take my hat off to it, and I do not trample on it. It is real sentiment which Camille Favier feels for you. I heard her speak of her love, the evening I saw her, while you were at supper with your coquette. I saw her, too, the next day when she received your cruel reply. This girl is true as gold. She loves you with all her heart. No, no, I will not help you to betray her, all the more so as the crisis is graver than you think."

I was wound up. I went on telling him with all the eloquence at my command the discoveries I had made and omitted to tell him a week before: the troubles of the pretty actress, what he had been, what he was to her, the ideal of passion and art she believed she was realizing in their liaison, the temptations of luxury which surrounded her, and the crime it is to provoke the first great deception in a human being. At last I was expending, in defending the little Blue Duchess to her lover, the warmth of the unfortunate love I myself felt for her. And I was so jealous of it! It was a grievous sentimental anomaly which Jacques did not discern in spite of his keenness. He could only see in my protests the deplorable *naïveté* with

which he always believed me to be contaminated, and he replied with a smile more indulgent than ironical—

"Did she tell you this in the two or three hours you were together? It is not a boat she has manned, it is a squadron, a flotilla, an armada! But, my friend, do you think I have not noticed the feelings of our little Blue Duchess? It is perfectly true that she was chaste before meeting me. But as she first threw herself at my head and knew perfectly well what she was doing, however modest she may have been, you will permit me to have no remorse, and all the more so since I have never concealed from her that I only offered her a fantasy and that I did not love her with real love. Even I have my own code of loyalty to women, although you don't think so. Only I place it so as not to deceive them upon the quality of the little combination to which I invite them in courting them. It is for them to accept and take the consequences. If to-day Camille experiences the temptation for luxury, which, by the way, I think very natural, this temptation has nothing to do with her broken ideal. She makes that pretty excuse to herself, and that, I think, is very natural too. She is almost as sincere as the young girls who make a wealthy marriage and excuse themselves for a first love betrayed. Ler her take her rich lover—you can give her my permission; let him pay for dresses for her by Worth, horses, carriages, a house and jewels! Let her take him this afternoon, to-

morrow, and I swear to you I shall have no more remorse than I have in lighting this cigarette. It will even amuse me when she does so. In the meantime, accept Madam Bonnivet's invitation. You will have a good dinner, a thing never to be disdained, and then you can thwart my dirty intrigue, as you call it, as much as you please. In love it is just as at chess. Nothing is so interesting as playing in difficulties. Besides, I am foolish to suppose even for a moment that you would not go. You will go, I can see it in your eyes."

"How?" I asked him, somewhat confused at his perspicacity. It was true that I felt my resolution to refuse destroyed by his presence alone.

"How? By your look while you are listening to me. Would you pay such attention if the story did not passionately interest you? It means that you would imagine us all three, Camille, Madame Bonnivet and myself, rather than pass from knowing us. I told you the other day, you are a born looker-on and confidant. You have been mine. You suddenly became Camille's, and now you must become Madam de Bonnivet's. You will receive the confidences of this woman of the world; you will receive them and believe them!" he insisted, accentuating each syllable, and he concluded: "That will be the punishment for your blasphemies. But it has just occurred to me, when do you begin the portrait of the Blue Duchess?"

It must be admitted that this devil of a man was not wrong; as a matter of fact, his adventure

hypnotized me with irresistible magnetism. After all, I did not leave his study till I had written with his pen on his paper a letter of acceptance to Madam Bonnivet. Besides that, I had done worse. In spite of the spasm of unreasonable and morbid jealousy which clutched my heart each time I thought of the intercourse between Jacques and his mistress, I made an appointment to begin the promised portrait, not that of the ideal dream Camille, but of the real one, who belonged to this man, who gave him her mouth, and her throat, and who surrendered herself entirely to him, and we arranged the first sitting for the day after Madam de Bonnivet's dinner, in my studio!

I repented of these two weaknesses before I was down the staircase of the house in the Place Delaborde, but not enough, alas, to return and take back my note, which Jacques had promised to deliver. My remorse increased as directly I entered my studio I saw Camille's head upon my easel. Delicious in her phantom and unfinished life, she smiled at me from her frameless canvas. "No, you will never finish me," she seemed to say to me with her sad eyes, her fine oval face, and her mouth framed in a melancholy smile. It is certain that neither that evening nor during the hours which followed had I the courage to touch that poor head, nor have I done so since. The enchantment was broken. I passed the ensuing hours in a state of singular agitation. I was seized again by the fever of my new-born

passion, and this time I had neither the hope nor the will to struggle. I felt that this week of renunciation and seclusion with the ideal Camille had given me the only joy that this passion, which was so false and also condemned in advance, would ever give me. These joys I renounced were symbolized to me by this chimerical portrait.

But to continue, I spent the day before Madam de Bonnivet's dinner in contemplation. Then when the moment of departure had come, I wished to bid adieu to this picture, or, rather, to ask its pardon. I experienced in the presence of this dream portrait, with which I had spent a sweet romantic week, as much inner remorse as if it had been the image, not of a chimera, but of an actually betrayed *fiancée*. I can see myself now as I appeared in the large mirror of the studio, walking with my fur coat open like a guilty man towards the canvas, which, after gazing at for the last time, I was about to hide by turning it face towards the wall in an adjoining garret. Did not the Camille Favier of my fancy disappear to give place to another as pretty, as touching perhaps, but not my Camille ?

But come, my sweet phantom, one more sigh, one more look, and I will return to reality. Reality was, in fact, a cab waiting at the door to take me through the driving rain to the Rue des Ecuries d'Artois, where the fashionable rival of the pretty actress dwelt. What would she say when Jacques told her that I had dined at her rival's house ? He would be sure to tell her in order to enjoy my

embarrassment. What would Madam de Bonnivet herself say? Why had she invited me? What did I really know about it? What did I know of her, save that the sight of her gave me a pronounced feeling of antipathy, and Jacques had told me many unpleasant things about her? But my antipathy might be mistaken, and Jacques might be slandering her as he did Camille Favier. "Suppose," I asked myself, "this coquette is caught in the net? It is not very likely," I replied, "seeing the hard blue of her eyes, her thin lips, her sharp profile, and the haughty harshness of her face. But still she might!"

It was less probable still, when one came to consider the frequent festivities and the gaiety at the house before which my modest cab stopped in the course of this monologue. I don't consider myself more stupidly plebeian than most people, but the sensation of arriving at a 600,000 franc house to take part in a fifty pound dinner in a vehicle fare thirty-five sous will always suffice to disgust me with the smart world without anything else. But other things had a similar effect on me, and the Bonnivets' house was one of them, for it seemed to me most like a parody of architecture, in which the feat has been achieved of mingling twenty-five styles and building a wooden staircase in the English style in a Renaissance framework; the hang-dog faces of the footmen in livery seemed like a gallery of mute insolence to the visitor. How could I bear this adornment of things and people without perceiving its hideous artificiality?

How could I help detesting the impression made by this furniture, which smelt of plunder and curiosity shops, for nothing was in its place: eighteenth century tapestry alternated with sixteenth century pictures, with furniture of the days of Louis XV, with modern sliding curtains, and with bits of ancient stoles furnishing off a reclining chair, the back of a couch, or the cushion of a divan! In short, when I was ushered into the boudoir drawing-room where Madam de Bonnivet held her assizes I was a greater partisan than ever of Camille, the brave little actress, as she had appeared to me in the modest room in the Rue de la Barouillère.

The millionairess rival of this poor girl was reclining rather than sitting upon a kind of bed of the purest Empire style, after the manner in which David has immortalized the cruel grace of Madam Récamier, the illustrious patroness of coquettes of the siren order. She wore one of those dresses which are very simple in appearance, but which in reality mark the limit between superior elegance and the other kind. The greatest artists in the business are the only ones successful with them. It consisted of a skirt of a thick dead-black silk which absorbed the light instead of reflecting it. A cuirass, a jet coat of mail, applied to this stuff, showed distinctly the shape of the bust, and allowed the whiteness of the flesh to shine through at the bare places at the shoulders and arms. A jet girdle, a model of those worn in ancient statues on tombs by queens of the Middle Ages, followed

the sinuous line of the hips, and terminated in two pendants crossed very low down. Enormous turquoises surrounded by diamonds shone in this pretty woman's ears. These turquoises and a golden serpent on each arm—two marvellous copies of golden serpents in the Museum at Naples—were the only jewels to lighten this costume, which made her figure look longer and more slender even than it was. Her blonde pallor, heightened by the contrast of this sombre harmony in black and gold, took the delicacy of living ivory. Not a stone shone in her clear golden hair, and it looked as if she had matched the blue of her turquoise with the blue of her eyes, so exactly similar was the shade, except that the blue of these stones, which is supposed to pale when the wearer is in danger, revealed tender and almost loving shades when compared with the metallic and implacable azure of her eyes. She was fanning herself with a large feather fan as black as her dress, on which was a countess' coronet encrusted in roses. It was without doubt a slight effort towards a definite relationship with the real Bonnivet. I have found out since that she went further than that. But the real Duc de Bonnivet, on the occasion of a charity fête, where Queen Anne had risked claiming a title, had interposed with a lordly and inflexible letter, and all that was left of this thwarted pretension was this coronet, embroidered here and there, without a coat of arms.

Near this slender and dangerous creature, so blonde and white in the dead-black sheath of her

spangled corsage and skirt, Senneterre, "the beater," was sitting on a very low chair, almost a footstool, while Pierre de Bonnivet warmed at the fire the soles of his pumps as he talked to my master Miraut. The latter seemed somewhat surprised, and not very pleased to see me. Dear old master; if he only knew how wrong he was in thinking that I was his rival for a 20,000-franc portrait! But this pastel merchant comes of the race of good giants. Besides his six foot in height, and suppleness from exercise, his porter's shoulders, broadened still more by his daily boxing, his Francis I profile, sensual, fine, and gluttonous, he has retained, beneath the trickery of the profession, a generous temperament. So he received me with a friendly though a little too patronizing greeting!

"Ah! then you know my pupil?" he said to Madam de Bonnivet. "He has great ability, only he lacks assurance and confidence in himself."

"But there are so many who have too much of these qualities," the young woman interposed, casting an evil glance at the pastelist who seemed disconcerted. "He makes up for them."

"Good!" I thought, "she is not in a good humour, nor even polite. It is quite true that Miraut is a little too conceited. But he is a man of great talent, who has done her a great honour by coming here. How bad-tempered she looks this evening! Bonnivet, too, looks preoccupied in spite of his mask of gaiety! I will stand by what

I told Jacques the other day. I would not trust either the woman or the husband. These cold-looking blondes are capable of anything, and so are strong full-blooded men like the husband. Now we shall see Jacques' manœuvre. To think that he could be so happy quite simply with his little friend! Life is really very badly arranged."

This fresh internal monologue was almost as distinct as I have written it. This doubling process proved the extreme excitement of my faculties. For my clear, distinct thoughts did not prevent me being all attention to the conversation which was reinforced by the presence of Count and Countess Abel Mosé. He is an accomplished type of the great modern financier. Strange to say, this kind of face which is often met with among the Jews is not displeasing to me. I can see in it the setting of a real passion. For people of this kind the vanity of their club and drawing-room life has at least its realism. In playing the part of the noble host they prove they have mounted one step of the social ladder. The life of fashion is to them a second business, which is in juxta-position to the other and continues it. It is a step gained; but what a life theirs must be to endure the wear and tear of these two existences, anxious cares alternating with exhausting pleasures, and years made up of days on the Stock Exchange followed by dinners in town. Then, too, Madam Mosé is very beautiful in her oriental fashion, with nothing of the conventional style and irregular features about her! She is the

Biblical Judith, the creature with eyes burning like the sands in the desert, over which the soldiers of Holophernes passed. "Who could hate the Hebrews when they have such women?" I said with them.

Five minutes afterwards pretty Madam Éthorel entered with her husband; then—"naturally," as Miraut said between his teeth, to make me understand that he knew the secrets of this society—Crucé the collector; then came Machault, a professional athlete, whom I have seen fence at the School of Arms; then appeared a certain Baron Desforges, a man of sixty, whose eye at once struck me as being almost too acute, and whose colour was too red, like that of a man of the world grown old. The conversation began to buzz, obligatory questions as to the weather and health being mingled with previous scandals and recollections of the day, which were very often full of ennui and simply mentioned for the sake of something to say. I can still hear some of these phrases.

"You don't take enough walking exercise," Desforges was saying to Mosé, who had declared that he felt a little heavy after a meal. "People digest with their legs, that is what Doctor Noirot is always dinning into my ears."

"But the time?" the financier replied.

"Try massage then," Desforges went on. "I will send Noirot to you. Massage is the essence of exercise."

"You did not buy these two candelabra?" Crucé was saying to Éthorel. "At three thousand

francs, my dear fellow, they were being given away."

"You were not skating this morning, Anne, dear," Madam Mosé was saying to Madam de Bonnivet; "it is a fine chance to take advantage of the early winter. Before the first of January, too! Think of it! It does not happen twice in a century. I looked for you there!"

"So did I," Madam Éthorel said. "You would have been amused at the sight of that old fool Madam Hurtrel on the ice, running after young Liauran. She was red in the face and perspiring, while he was carrying on with Mabel Adrahan."

"It amuses you, madam. But if I said I pitied her?" Senneterre said.

"Respect love! We know her," Madam de Bonnivet interrupted with that bitter laugh which I had noticed at the theatre. She was visibly in a nervous state, which I explained to myself when the dinner was served and Jacques had not arrived. I was soon to learn both the false excuse and the real reason of his absence. During the first course the flowers and silver upon the dinner-table directed the conversation to the subject of the taste of the period and mistakes made on the stage. The guests all combined to praise the skill of the late M. Perrin in the putting on of modern comedies. The talk drifted to actual plays, and an allusion being made to *La Duchesse Blue*, one of the guests, Machault, I think it was, said—

"Has its run ceased altogether? As I passed

along the Boulevard I saw there was a change of bill at the Vaudeville this evening. Do you know the cause of it ? "

Because Bressoré has a severe cold and is too unwell to act. I heard that by accident at the Club," Mosé said, " and the play rests upon his shoulders. He is clever, but he is the only one in the company," he went on, and this proved that Madam de Bonnivet's antipathy to Camille Favier had not escaped the dark, observant eyes of the business man.

" It appears to be contagious in the theatre," said Bonnivet. " Molan should have been here, but he excused himself at the last moment. He has a slight attack himself."

As he said this he looked at his wife, who did not even deign to listen to him. She was talking to Miraut, who was near her. Neither her metallic voice nor her hard, clear eyes betrayed the least sign of trouble, but the cruel curves she sometimes had at the corners of her mouth made it more cruel, and a little throbbing of the nostrils, imperceptible but to one of my profession or a jealous man, revealed that the absence of Jacques was the cause of her nervousness. At the same time I felt that Bonnivet was scrutinizing my face with the same look which he gave to his wife, and three things became evident to me : one, and the most terrible was that the husband was suspicious of the relations between Queen Anne and my comrade ; the second was that my companion had seized the opportunity of the change of bill to

provoke in the coquette an access of spiteful jealousy by passing, or pretending to pass, the evening with Camille Favier; the third was that this simple ruse wounded the vanity of the pretty actress' rival to the quick. These three instinctive conclusions, two of which at least were fraught with the most serious consequences, were sufficient to render the commonplace dinner passionately interesting to me.

I could not help concentrating my whole attention on Pierre de Bonnivet and his wife. On the other hand, I feared that directly we left the dinner-table they would try to make me talk, and I did not wish to betray Molan either to her, or particularly to him. The easily distended veins of his full-blooded forehead, his greenish eyes so quick to display anger, and the coarse red hair, which grew right down his arms to his fingers, were all signs of brutality which gave me the impression that he was a redoubtable person. Tragic action would be as natural to him as grievous timidity to me or fatuous insolence to Jacques. The evening ought not to end without furnishing me with the proof that my diverse intuitions had not deceived me. We had just left the dinner-table for the smoking-room when Machault said to me as he took my arm—

"You see a good deal of Jacques Molan, don't you, La Croix?"

"We were at college together, and I see him sometimes still," I replied evasively.

"Ah, well! If you see him in a day or two,

warn him that Senneterre met him to-night when on his way here. Consequently they know his cold and headache are only an excuse. It is of no other importance, but with Anne it is always better to be well informed."

I had no time to question the brave swordsman, who had smiled an unaccountable smile as he uttered this enigmatic phrase, for just then Pierre de Bonnivet came towards us with a box of cigars in one hand and a box of cigarettes in the other. I took a Russian cigarette, while the robust gladiator put into his mouth a veritable tree trunk, wrinkled and black. Then before the coffee, espying upon the table a bottle of fine champagne, he filled a little glass, which he proceeded to enjoy, saying as he did so—

"This is an excellent appetizer with which to start the evening."

"Will you have, M. la Croix, a cup of coffee? No. A drop of Kummel or Chartreuse?" Bonnivet asked. "Not even a thimbleful of cherry brandy?"

"No liqueur or coffee this evening," I said, and I added with a smile: "I have not the stomach or the nerves of a Hercules."

"There is no need to be as strong as Machault to like alcohol. Take our friend Molan, for instance," the husband said, watching me as he pronounced the name. Then after a short silence he said: "Do you know what is really the matter with him?"

"I don't know," I replied. "Perhaps he has

overworked himself. He works harder than he drinks."

"But he loves little Favier still more?" my questioner insisted, giving me another keen glance.

"He loves little Favier more still," I replied in the same indifferent tone.

"Has this affair been going on for long?" the husband asked after a little hesitation.

"As long as *La Duchesse Blue* has been running. It is a honeymoon in its first quarter."

"But his indisposition this evening when she is not acting?" he asked me without entirely formulating his question, though I completed it in my reply, giving it a cynical form which relieved my discomfort.

"Would it be an excuse to pass an evening with her and afterwards the night? I don't know, I am sure, but it is very likely."

I could see at these words, which I hope if Camille Favier ever reads these pages she will forgive, the face of the jealous husband brighten. Evidently the note of excuse sent by Molan at the last minute had not seemed to him genuine. He had found out that Madam de Bonnivet was annoyed at it, and asked himself the reason. Did he think that he had stumbled upon, between his wife and Jacques, one of those momentary quarrels which, more than constant attentions, denounce a love intrigue? He suspected that I was in my comrade's confidence. He thought I knew the real reason of his absence, and his suspicion was soothed at the sincerity of my voice. As jealous

people, being all imagination, mistrust themselves and reassure themselves at the same time, he assumed his most charming manner to say to Baron Deforges, who came in, having delayed a little while in joining us—

"Ah, well, Frederick, were you pleased with the dinner?"

"I have just called Asmé to congratulate him on the little timbales and to make an observation about the *foie gras*," the Baron replied. "I shall not tell you what it was, but you shall judge from experience. He is, as I have always said, what I call a real chef. But he is still young."

"He will shape better," said Bonnivet as he threw me a meaning look, "with a master like you."

"He is the seventh who has passed through my hands," Deforges said with a shrug of the shoulders and in the most serious tones, "not one more, since I have known what eating really is. The seventh, do you hear? Then I pass them on to you and you spoil them by your praise. Chefs are like other artists. They are not proof against the compliments of the ignorant."

I had reckoned on going for a short time from the smoking-room to the drawing-room and, after a short period of polite and general conversation there, on leaving in the English fashion, taking advantage of the return of the smokers or the arrival of fresh guests to do so. When I reached the drawing-room there were only the two ladies who had dined and Senneterre there. Such small parties being unfavourable to private conversation,

I had reason to hope that Madam de Bonnivet would not have the opportunity of cornering and confessing me. I little knew this capricious and authoritative woman who was also well acquainted with her husband's ways. She had realized that it would not do for her to talk to me in Bonnivet's presence. Directly I appeared she rose from the couch where she was sitting by Madam Ethorel's side facing Madam Mosé, with Senneterre on a low chair at her feet holding her fan. She came towards me and led the way into a second drawing-room which opened out of the first, where she sat down upon a couch near me.

"We can talk more quietly here," she began. Then she sharply said: "Is your portrait of Mademoiselle Favier far advanced?" She had a way of questioning which betrayed the despotism of the rich and pretty woman who regards the person to whom she is talking in the light of a servant to amuse or inform her. Each time I come across this unconscious insolence in a fashionable doll an irresistible desire seizes me to give her a disagreeable answer. Jacques had without doubt speculated upon this trait of my character in making me play the part of exciter, which, however, I refused with such loyal energy to do.

"The portrait of Mademoiselle Favier? Why, I have not even begun it," I replied.

"Ah!" she said with a nasty smile, "has Molan changed his mind and forbidden it? You are in love with the pretty little woman, M. la Croix' confess it?"

"In love with her?" I replied. "Not the least bit in the world."

"It looked like it the other day," she said, "and Jacques Molan was, in fact, a little bit jealous of you."

"All lovers are more or less jealous," I interposed, and yielding to the desire I felt to hurt her, I added: "He is very wrong; Camille Favier loves him with all her heart, and she has a big heart."

"It is a great misfortune for her talent," Madam de Bonnivet said, knitting her blonde brows just enough to let me know that I had struck home.

"I cannot agree with you, madam," I replied this time with conviction. "Little Favier has not only adorable beauty, but she has a sort of genius too, and a charming heart and mind."

"One would never suspect it from seeing her act," she replied, "at least, in my opinion. But if so, it is worse still. Happiness has never yet inspired a writer. But I am sure this affair will not last long. Molan will find out that she has deceived him with a side scene with a member of the company and then——"

"You are wrongly informed about this poor girl, madam," I interrupted more quickly than was absolutely polite. "She is very noble, very proud, and quite incapable of a mean action."

"But that does not prevent her being kept by Molan," she interrupted, "if my information is accurate, and eating up his author's rights to the last sou."

"Kept!" I cried. "No, madam, your information is very inaccurate. If she desired luxury she could have it. She has refused a house, horses, dresses, jewels, and all the things which tempt one in her position, to give herself where her heart is. She loves Jacques with a most sincere and beautiful attachment."

"I pity her if you are right," she said with a sneer; "for your friend is not much good."

"He is my friend," I replied with an aggressive dryness, "and I am original enough to defend my friends."

"That is a reason why one should attack them all the more." This pretty woman's fine face expressed, as she made this commonplace observation, such detestable wickedness, and the conversation betrayed on her part such odious meanness and hatred, that my antipathy for her increased to hate, and I replied to her insolence by another—

"In the world in which you live, perhaps, madam, but not in our world where there are a few decent people."

She looked at me as I launched this impertinence, which was not even clever, at her. I read in her blue eyes less anger than surprise. One of the peculiar characteristics of these coquettish jades is to esteem those who oppose them in some degree or manner. She smiled an almost amiable smile.

"Molan told me that you were original," she replied. "But you know I am somewhat original, too, and I think we should get on together."

Here was a sudden change of front in her conversation, and I was again given an exhibition of that female intelligence which in the box had enabled her to hit upon the words to please me. Now she talked to me of my travels. She herself had visited Italy. Without doubt she had there met some distinguished artist who had acted as her guide, for she enunciated ideas which contrasted strangely with the mediocrity of her previous conversation. Assuredly the ideas were not her own, but she retained them and realized that now was her chance to place them. She made in this way two or three ingenuous remarks upon Perugins and Raphael, notably upon the illogicalness of the latter, in eliminating from his Madonnas every Christian sentiment to give them too much beauty, a paganism of health irreconcilable with the mystic beyond and his dream. She had such a way of appearing to understand what she was saying, that I did not think ridiculous the admiration with which the ninny Senneterre, who had joined us, listened to her remarks. This jealous fellow had not been able to prevent himself from interrupting our *tête-à-tête*, and as Madam de Bonnivet, strange to say, did not bully him, he began to lavish his benevolence upon me. He had his plan, too, the final scene of his naïve thinking out being a Vaudeville scene that evening when I experienced for a moment a little dramatic shudder. He insisted, when I said good night, before eleven, on accompanying me, and he began to sing the praises of Queen Anne as we walked along the Champs Élysées. Then

as we passed the Avenue d'Antin he asked me carelessly—

"Have you ever done any pistol shooting?"

"Never," I replied.

"Bonnivet is a first-rate shot," he went on, "quite first class. Go and see his target cards some day. He has put ten shots in a space as large as a 20 franc piece; it is quite a curiosity, I can assure you."

He left me to go along the Rue Francois I, where he lived, with this sinister warning.

CHAPTER VI

"AH! did he work the infallible pistol trick on you?" Jacques said with a burst of his loudest laughter when we met the following day. "That is very good. He looked you in the face to make you understand that if you court Madam de Bonnivet, you run the risk of getting in your head one of the bullets with which the husband every day salutes the sheet-iron man at the range. He did better with me. He took me to see the targets."

This conversation took place at the breakfast-table, for Jacques had called on the following morning as soon as his four pages were finished to ask for the classic egg and cutlet, a thing he had never done before. This curious haste proved to me how interested he was in the success of his manœuvre in diplomatic gallantry. I had not received him very cordially.

"Tricks like that are not very attractive," I said to him; "you force me to accept an invitation to dinner which is odious to me, on purpose to meet you there, and then you do not turn up."

"But you must admit that it was very jolly!" he replied in such a gay tone that I had not the

heart to be angry any more. After he had very minutely questioned me as to the diverse attitudes of different persons, concluding with the ridiculous warning of Senneterre the Jealous, he said seriously—

"You noticed nothing in particular then, even you who know how to see? Yes, you painters do not understand, but you know how to see. Nothing in the intercourse of Machault and Queen Anne, for instance?"

"Stop," I replied; "certainly when he warned me that Senneterre had met you, Machault gave me a singular look. Why do you ask me that? Is he paying court to her too?"

"I think, if she has already risked a false step, it is with Machault."

"With Machault?" I cried. "With Machault, the drunken colossus, the gladiator in black, the fencing machine, while she herself is such a fine woman, though a little too angular for my taste, and so aristocratic? It is not possible. The other day, too, you told me that you thought she was true to her husband."

"Ah, my dear fellow!" he said with a nod, "you do not know that when one wishes to find out of whom an ideal woman, a siren, a madonna, an angel, is the mistress, one must first think of the most vulgar person of her own circle. There has been a good deal of gossip about her, I know, and she knows that I know. I have not concealed the fact from her. Consequently, the presence of Machault last evening was designed to produce

upon me exactly the same effect which I produced upon her by my absence. I took the initiative, and I was right. Besides," he added with almost hateful acrimony in his voice, " one of two things, either she has already had lovers and she is a jade. In that case I should be the greatest of fools if I did not have her in my turn. Or else she has not had lovers and is a coquette who will not make me go the same way as the others."

" If you are not wasting your time," I replied to him, " I shall be very surprised. I studied her yesterday, and as you admit the eagle eyes of our profession, let me tell you that I have diagnosed in her the signs of the most complete absence of temperament, which are a little throat, small hips, skin without down, thin lips, the lower one receding a little, hard and lean nostrils, and metallic voice. I would wager that she has no palate, and that she does not know what she eats or drinks. She is a creature all intellect without a shadow of sensuality."

" But these cold women have just as many intrigues as the others ! " he interrupted. " You do not know that class then ? They give themselves, not to surrender themselves, but to take others. When it is necessary for them to grip a lover tightly, a lover they need, they do so with their person the more easily since the pleasure of it is a matter of indifference to them. They know that possession detaches some men and attaches others. It is simply a question of persuading them that one is of the kind who become attached

in this way, when one is not. Then, too, there are cold women who are hunters, and then! Sometimes I place Madam de Bonnivet in the first group, sometimes in the second. I do not pretend to solve the riddle of this sphinx. But failing the answer to the riddle of this sphinx, I will have the sphinx in person, or my name is not Jacques Molan. Then, as you have helped me and are just, you shall have a reward. You will no longer reproach me with that dinner in the Rue des Écuries d'Artois. You shall be paid for your unpleasant task. What time is it? Half-past one. Prepare to see in ten minutes Mademoiselle Camille Favier herself enter with her respectable mother to arrange about the portrait. Is not that good of me? But I have been better still, and I have not told her where you dined yesterday."

He had hardly told me of this visit, so disturbing to me, in his joking way, when the servant said that two ladies were waiting for me in the studio. God! how my heart beat when I was about to enter the presence of the woman I had sworn to avoid! How my heart beats even now at my vivid and precise recollection of this meeting long ago! I believe that I can see the two of them, mother and daughter, in the crude light of that bright January day which filled, by means of the large glass bay, the studio with a cold pale light. Madam Favier, more placid and smiling than ever, walked from canvas to canvas, looking at them with her great laughing eyes. She would suddenly ask me what was the net cost of a picture, and what

did it fetch, with as much simplicity as if it were a question of a dress or a curio. Camille sat down opposite a copy of "L'Allégorie du Printemps," which I had made in Florence so lovingly. In the long and supple dancers of the divine Sandro, who lent with tender grace their blonde and dreamy though bitter faces, the little Blue Duchess could recognize her sisters. She did not see them, absorbed as she was in a memory, the nature of which I could easily guess, seeing that she had not acted the previous evening, and had found a way to spend that free evening with Jacques, thanks to a complaisant cousin. It hurt me to detect around her tender, almost blood-shot eyes a pearly halo of lassitude, and on her mouth tremors which told of happiness. But what made me feel worse still was that Jacques, directly he came in, copied the photographs I had used to make my dream-picture of her—that chimerical picture of my week of folly, which happily I had put aside and well concealed; and at the moment Camille was greeting me with a slightly embarrassed smile, he displayed those instructive pictures and said maliciously—

"You can see, mademoiselle, that if Vincent has not been to see you again as he promised, he has not forgotten you."

"It was to better prepare the studies for my future picture," I stammered. "The great painter Lenbach does so."

"Who contradicted you?" Molan went on even more maliciously.

"Oh! you have not picked out the best ones," the mother interrupted as she showed her daughter the photograph I loved best. "You see," she said, "that in spite of your prohibition, this picture which is such a bad likeness of you is still being sold. Come, now, is it anything like her? I ask you to decide the point, M. La Croix."

"I was three years younger," Camille said, "and he did not know me then." Taking the photograph she looked at it in her turn. Then putting it by the side of her face so that I could see the model and the portrait at the same time, she asked me: "Have I changed very much?"

Poor little Blue Duchess, the sincere lover of the least loving of my friends, romantic child stranded by an ironical caprice of fate in the profession most fatal to mystery, silence and solitude, when the pretty, delicate flowers of your woman's soul needed a warm atmosphere of protective intimacy, say, did you suspect my emotion when I looked at your face, paled by the pleasures of the previous evening, smiling at me thus by the side of another face, the face of the innocent child you were once, when I might have loved you as my betrothed wife? No, certainly you did not. For you were good; and if you had guessed what I suffered, you would not have imposed upon me this useless ordeal. You would not on that visit have arranged with me the details of that series of sittings which began the following day and were for me a strange and sorrowful Calvary! Yes, however, perhaps you did guess, for there was sad-

ness and pity in your smile—sorrow for yourself and pity for me. You saw so clearly from that moment that I bore an affection for you which was too quickly awakened to be the reasonable and simple friendship of a comrade! You saw it without wishing to admit it, for love is an egoist. Yours had need of being related, to be encouraged in its hopes, comforted in its doubts, and pitied in its grief. Who would have rendered you the service of lending himself as a complaisant echo of your passion like I did? If it cost me my rest for weeks and weeks; if on your departure from my studio after each sitting, just as after your first visit, I remained for hours struggling against the bitterness of which I have not yet emptied my heart, you did not wish to know, and I had not the strength to condemn you to do so. After all, you made me feel, as Jacques used to say, and there will come a time perhaps when, passing my memories in review, I shall bless you for the tears I shed, sometimes as if I were no more than eighteen, on your account, who did not see them. Had you seen them, you would have refused to believe in them, to preserve the right to initiate me into the inner tragedy in which you then lived, and which by a counter stroke, alas! was not spared me.

If I allowed these impressions to go on, I should fill the pages with groans like this, and never reach the tragedy itself, or rather the tragic comedy, in which I played the part of the ancient Chorus, the ineffectual witness of catastrophies, who deplored them without preventing them. Let us

employ the only remedy for this useless elegy. Let us note the little facts clearly. I have mentioned that this visit of mother and daughter had as its object the arrangement of a series of sittings. I have also mentioned that the first of these sittings was placed for the following day.

On the following day Camille arrived, not accompanied by her mother, but alone. It was so almost always during the four weeks which this painting lasted, but during the whole of this time the work did not succeed in interesting the artist in me, for my attention was too much absorbed by the adorable child's confidences, confidences which were ceaselessly interrupted, repeated and prolonged by the interruptions till the details were multiplied and complicated to infinity. Yes, many little facts come into my mind in trying to recall these private sittings which were always somewhat bitter to me. This liberty proved to me how many favourable opportunities her intrigue with Jacques had obtained. Too many little scenes recur to me, and too many multiple and over-lapping impressions which my memory is apt to confuse. It is like a tangled skein of thread I am trying in vain to unravel. Let us see if I can reduce them to some kind of order in classifying them.

These recollections, which are so numerous and so similar that they become mixed, are distributed, when I reflect, into three distinct groups; and these groups mark the stages of this purely moral drama, in which Camille, Jacques and Madam de

Bonnivet were engaged, in its progress to a real and terrible drama. When I reflect again, it was the difference between these three groups of emotions which justified me in not making a success of this portrait. Had I been an artist who was an imperturbable master of execution, in place of being what I am, half an amateur, always uncertain, and a sort of " Adolphe " of the brush, all intention and touches, all scratching out and alteration, I should not have been able to execute a unique canvas under such conditions. It was not a woman I had before me during these too long and too short sittings, it was three women.

One after the other I will resuscitate these three women, I will make them pose before my eyes, according to the taste of my memory, as if the irreparable, and such an irreparable, were not between us ! One after the other they come back to sit in this studio where I am writing these lines. One after the other I listen to them telling me, the first her joy, the second her sorrow, and the third the fury of her jealousy and the fever of her indignation ; and yet to-day I do not know before which of the three women, and during which of the three periods I suffered the most, my suffering being the greater because I was obliged to be silent ; and behind each of the confidences little Favier gave me, whether she were happy, melancholy, or angry, I could see the hard silhouette of the elegant rival, to whose caprices this joy, sorrow or anger were subordinated. Oh, God ! what punishment for hybrid sentiments, those

sentiments which have not the courage to go to the end in the logic of sacrifice or gratification, I experienced during those sittings! But still I would like to begin them again. I am writing of misery again and composing more elegies. Let me get on with the facts, facts, facts!

The first period, that of joy, was not of long duration. The scene which marked its culminating point took place on the fourth of these sittings. The scene, though a fine expression, merely consisted of a conversation without any other incident than Camille's entry into the studio with a bunch of roses—large, heavy roses of all shades—some pale with the dewy pallor of her face, others blonde and almost of the same golden tint as her beautiful hair, others as red as her pretty mouth with its lower lip so tightly rolled, others dark, which by contrast appeared to light up her bloodless colour that morning. The question was, which of these flowers I should choose for her to hold in her hand. I wished to paint her in an absolute unity of tone, like Gainsborough's blue boy. She had to stand wearing a dress of blue gauze, that of her part, with blue silk mittens, blue velvet at the neck, blue ribbons at the sleeves, her feet in blue satin shoes, with no jewels but sapphires and turquoises on a ground of peacock blue velvetine, with no head-dress but the blonde cloud of her fine hair, with the back of one of her hands resting upon her supple hip, while she offered a rose with her other hand.

"It is my youth that I will offer Jacques," she

said to me that morning while we studied the pose together; "my twenty-two years and my happiness. I am so happy now!"

"You don't experience any more evil temptations, then?" I asked.

"Do you remember?" she replied, laughing and blushing at the same time. "No, I don't feel them now. I turned Tournade out of my dressing-room, and pretty quickly, I can assure you. But do you know what pleases me most? I never see that ugly woman now; you remember, Madam de Bonnivet. She does not come to the theatre, and the other day Jacques ought to have dined with her, but he did not go. I am quite sure of that, for he wrote his letter of excuse in my presence. It was the evening Bressoré could not act: there was a change of bill and I was free for the evening. I wanted so badly to ask him if we could spend it together, but I did not dare. He suggested it himself, and now every day I have a fresh proof of his tenderness. He is coming for me presently to take me to lunch. Ah! how I love him, how I love him! How proud I am of loving him!"

What answer could I make to such phrases, and what could I do but allow her to remain enraptured by this illusion as she was enraptured by the scent of the roses which she inhaled, closing as she did so her clear azure eyes—another note of blue in the harmony which I sought? What could I do but suffer in silence at the idea that this recrudescence of tenderness in the sensual and complex Molan was, without doubt, a trick. Some

harshness on the other woman's part was certainly the cause of it. Camille took for the marks of passionate ardour the fever of excitation into which Madam de Bonnivet had thrown Jacques without gratifying it. When a woman has, as the pretty actress so nicely put it, her twenty years of age and her youth to offer, she cannot guess that in her arms her lover is thinking of another woman, and exalting his senses by her image! That morning I kept silent as to what I knew. To make her laugh and keep myself from weeping, I told her the story of a real duchess of the eighteenth century, who wished to give her miniature to her lover before he took the field with the troops. She went to the painter with her eyes so fatigued by the tender folly of her good-bye that the painter declared he would not continue the portrait if she did not become more virtuous, for her beauty had changed so.

"Ah!" the duchess said as she put her arms round her lover's neck in the painter's presence, "if that is the case, then life is too short to have one's portrait painted."

"Ah! how true what he has just been saying is, Jacques!" Camille cried as she went to meet Jacques who came in at that moment. I can see her now leaning her loving head upon the knave's shoulder, the latter being condescending, indulgent, almost tender, because I was there to assist at this foolish explosion of affection. This picture is a very good résumé of the first period which might be entitled: Camille happy!

Camille sad! That was the title of the second

period which began almost immediately and lasted much longer. The scene which sums up the period in my memory is one quite unlike that of the roses, the scent of which she inhaled with such confident ecstasy, and that of the kiss she gave Jacques with such charming shamelessness. This time it was about the eleventh or twelfth sitting. I had noticed for some days that my model's expression had changed. I had not dared to question her, for I was just as much afraid to learn that Jacques treated her well as that he treated her badly. That morning she was to come at half-past ten, and it was not ten yet. I was engaged in looking through a portfolio of drawings after the old Florentine masters, without succeeding in engrossing myself in their study. That is what takes the place of opium with me in my bad moments. Usually merely looking at these sketches recalls to me the frescoes of Ghirlandajo, of Benozzo, of Fra Filippo Lippi, of Signorelli, and many others ; I find intact in me that fervour for the ideal which made me almost mad in my youth, when I went from little town to little town, from church to church, and from cloister to cloister.

In those days a half-effaced silhouette of the Madonna, hardly visible upon a bit of wall eaten up by the sun, was enough to make me happy for an afternoon. The profiles of virgins dreamed by the old Tuscans, the bent figures of their young lords in their puffy doublets, the minute horizons in their vast landscapes, with battlements and campaniles upon the eminences, roads bordered

by cypress trees and valleys glistening with running water—all this charm of primitive art was there imprisoned in this portfolio of sketches and ready to emerge from it to charm my fantasy. But my imagination was elsewhere, occupied with this problem in æsthetics very far distant from the frescoes and convents of Pisa or Sienne. "Camille was very sad again yesterday. Has the absurd Jacques resumed with the absurd Madam de Bonnivet?" That was what I was asking myself, instead of by the help of my sketches revisiting Italy, dear divine Italy, the land of beauty.

The reply to my question as to the cause of Camille's sadness was given me by Molan himself. I had not had any private conversation with him since our chance breakfast on the day previous to the first sitting. I did not expect to see him enter my studio that morning more than any other morning, knowing his rule to write four pages before midday, and the vigour with which this methodical purveyor of literature conformed to it. So when his voice disturbed me I was for a moment really apprehensive. The servant had opened the door without me hearing him, reclining as I was upon a divan turning over the portfolio of sketches as if I were rendered unconscious by my excess of anxiety. I had no time to form an hypothesis in my own mind. My unexpected visitor had realized my astonishment from my face, and he anticipated my questions by saying—

"Yes, here I am! You did not expect me, did you? Make your mind easy, I am not come to

inform you that Camille has asphyxiated herself with a coke fire of the latest fashion, nor that she has thrown herself into the Seine because of my bad conduct. By the way, the portrait is not a bad one. You have made progress, much progress, with it. But that is not the reason of my visit. Camille will be here directly, and I want you to tell her that I dined with you last evening, and that we did not separate till one o'clock this morning!"

"You have conceived the brilliant idea of involving me in your lies," I replied irritably "I thought I told you the part did not suit me."

"I know," he said in a half apologetic tone obviously destined to wheedle me, "and I understand your scruples so thoroughly that I have left you in peace all this time. But matters progress in the other direction, and if you had been able to assist me, Bonnivet would no longer pass under the Arc de Triomphe. Excuse the pleasantry worthy of the late Paul de Kock. But this time it is not on my account, but for Camille's sake; I want to spare her an unnecessary sorrow. Have you noticed how sad she has been lately?"

"Yes, and thought it was a sorrow of your making."

"You are turning to psychology," he replied not without irony. "It is very much out of fashion, I warn you. But don't let us exchange epigrams," he went on seriously. "The little one will be here to pose directly, and if I met her we should be lost. I will put you in possession of the facts in five minutes. I must first tell you that she is again

on the track of my flirtation with Queen Anne, on whom, in parenthesis, you have not called and left your card. By the way, give me one and I will leave it for you on my next visit. As the flirtation is at the moment very accentuated, Camille is very, very jealous and very distrustful. In short, yesterday there was the inverse of the other comedy. You recall the dinner trick, don't you? I received about four o'clock two notes, one from Madam de B—— signifying that . . . But the contents of this note would make you jump if I told them to you. In reality you are very naïve and still believe in a woman's modesty. Confine yourself to theknowledge that inher husband's absence—he has been called into the country to see a sick relative—Queen Anne had arranged to dine and spend the evening with me. The other note was from Camille, to tell me that in the absence of her mother, who was also called into the country by a sick relative, knowing that I was disengaged for the evening, she had arranged for us to dine and return home together after *La Duchesse Curtain.*

"So you naturally preferred Madam de B——, and told Camille that you were dining with me?"

"I have not told you everything," he said. "I thought it better to receive the note too late. For I might have gone out at four o'clock and not have returned to dinner? She will be here directly. Be careful not to mention my visit this morning. Say incidentally, without appearing to intend to do so, that you had some friends to dinner yesterday, and that I was among them. She

believes you. When she reaches home she will find a wire from 'yours truly' confirming the story, and the trick is done, unless Senneterre——"

"What has Senneterre to do with it?" I asked.

"I told you that he was Queen Anne's platonic lover, and you observed it yourself; he is platonic, and as jealous as if he had the right to be so. Consequently he detests me. He goes still further and watches me. The idea has occurred to him to join hands with Camille. He had the audacity to ask me, in an off-hand way, to introduce him, and four or five times afterwards I found him in her dressing-room. Has she not mentioned it to you? No. He is quite likely to have told her, before last evening, as if by accident, that Bonnivet was leaving Paris with the sole object of letting her loose at me and of putting a spoke in the wheel of the carriage in which Queen Anne has at last consented to ride. Do not be too scandalized, we have only got as far as the carriage. There is no question, too, between us of what some women of the world call so quaintly, 'the little crime.' But it is a quarter past ten and I must go. Drop me a line this afternoon."

"What about this morning's four pages?" I asked as I accompanied him to the door.

"I have given myself a holiday," he replied; "my two-act comedy is finished, and if I bring off this coup I shall give myself quite ten days' holiday. What do you think of my luck? How fortunate that this adventure with Queen Anne

should have happened this month, between two periods of work ? "

This audacious person was quite right to talk of his luck. Had he been a moment later in going out he would have met his poor mistress on my staircase. Camille, who was usually a little later than half-past ten in arriving, was this morning early. The old Breton clock, to whose monotonous voice I had so long listened in my studio like a constant and never-heeded warning not to waste work-time in reverie, made the time twenty-five minutes past ten. When the charming girl appeared I could see at a glance that she was again experiencing an acute crisis of sorrow. Insomnia had encircled her eyes with bluish rings. Fever had cracked and dried up her lips, which were generally so fresh, young and full. A sombre flame burned in the depths of her eyes. Insomnia had made her cheeks livid, and with her fingers she was mechanically twisting a little cambric handkerchief with red flowers on it from which her teeth had torn all shape. I had before me the living image of jealousy and despair. What a contrast with the victorious smile I had just seen hovering around the lips and in the eyes of the man who had caused that pain and thought as much of it as of his first article ! I realized once more that morning how easily pity leads to lies. The unhappy creature had hardly taken off her hat and cloak before I began to chide her in our usual friendly joking tone.

" I don't think we shall do any work to-day,"

I said to her, " little Blue Duchess, and I am much afraid it will not be for the same motive which made the other Duchess say, a hundred years ago, that life is too short to have one's portrait painted; but I will say it is too short for the troubles you are making for yourself. You have been crying, confess ? "

" No," she replied evasively. " But I did not close my eyes all night. I did not even go to bed."

" Jacques will scold you when I tell him of your conduct, and I warn you that I shall report it."

" Jacques," she said, knitting the blonde bar of her pretty lashes. " He looks after me well, does Jacques," and she shrugged her shoulders as she repeated : " He looks after me well ! "

" You are again unjust," I said with my heart pierced by remorse at my own tender hypocrisy. " You ought to have heard him talk about you last evening after dinner ! "

" Last evening ? " she replied, raising her head and her drooping shoulders with a movement which shamed me. It betrayed such passionate gratitude. " Did you see Jacques last evening then ? "

" He stopped to dinner," I said, " and we separated at an impossible hour after midnight."

" Is that true ? " she asked in an almost raucous voice ; and she supplicatingly said : " Tell me that it is true and I will believe you. But don't lie to me. From you it would be too horrible." She seized my hand in hers as she said : " Do not be offended. I know that you would not lend your-

self to deceive me and that you are my friend. I will explain it to you now how I heard that Bonnivet, you know, the husband of that horrible woman, was away. Then I got the idea into my head that they would take advantage of his absence, Jacques and her, to spend the evening together; I freed myself by lying to my mother, the first time I have done so, and I wrote a note to him asking him to dine with me. I was well punished for my two lies. He did not reply. Repeat to me that I was foolish, that he was with you last evening, not with her. O God! let me weep. It does me so much good. Oh, thank God he was not with her, not with her!"

As she talked to me like this every word entered my conscience like the most cruel reproach. She then burst into tears, and the tears which flowed down her thin cheeks were long, abundant tears which she wiped with her poor little handkerchief on which the edges of her teeth had left traces of her nervousness and anguish. I experienced, as I watched her genuine tears flow, poignant remorse for my falseness. It was no longer possible for me to go back on what I had said, and ninety-nine men out of a hundred in acting as I had done would have believed that they were doing right. I myself had enough evidence to realize that this passage from pity to lies, which had been so natural to me, constituted a real crime in the presence of such profound passion. The heart which loves and suffers has a right to know the entire truth whatever it may be. The thankful

smiles which Camille gave me through her tears were almost physically intolerable to me. Besides, one does not deceive for long the lucidity of justified jealousy. Can it be blinded even for a minute ? It is soothed by being misled as regards the facts. What are facts ? When a woman feels herself to be loved even the most convincing count for nothing. When a woman feels, as Camille did, treachery hovering around her in the atmosphere, illusion is no sooner produced on one point than lucidity awakens on another. The person goes on searching in the dark for a proof which is always forthcoming, very often by a chance which is all the more grievous as it is not considered. No. If it were to begin over again at the risk of playing in my own eyes the obvious part of the cruel wretch, I would not lend myself to that cowardly lying charity to which I leant myself that morning. The only result of it was to render more painful the scene, to the recital of which I have now come, the scene which marks the definite entrance into the third period, that of furious certainty and exasperated despair.

CHAPTER VII

THREE more weeks had passed, and the never-ending picture had undergone so many touches that it was a little less advanced than before. It is the certain sign that an artistic creation will not result : work destroys it instead of improving it, and it is a proof, too, that we do not accomplish works worthy of the name, they are made in us, without effort, without will, almost unknown to us. The sittings, too, became more and more irregular. Camille began to rehearse the piece to follow *La Duchesse Blue*, and sometimes from one excuse, sometimes another, one day because she was fatigued, another because she was studying her part, she found a way of putting off half her visits to the studio. When she did sit it was under very different conditions to the first sittings. Her *tête-à-tête* with me had been a necessity to her at the time of her sweet confidences and even at the time of her tender uneasy complaints. A fear came to her now that her jealousy of her rival would endow her with an acute character of suspicious inquiry.

Not once during the three weeks, the anxious expectancy of which I am summarizing here, did

she come alone to the studio. Sometimes her mother, sometimes her cousin, sometimes a companion accompanied her. I should have known nothing of her but for guessing at her troubles from the very pronounced alteration in her face and her increasing nervousness on the one hand, and for having, on the other hand, three conversations with Jacques which were very brief but well calculated to edify me as to the cause of the poor Blue Duchess' terrible trouble.

"Don't talk to me of her," he said on the first occasion with angry harshness; "I should be unjust, for she loves me after all. But what a character she has! what a character!"

"Ah! so she still continues to play to you her comedy of the beautiful soul unappreciated," he jeered on the second occasion. "Come, don't let us talk about her any more."

On the last occasion he said violently: "As you are so interested in her, I am going to give you a commission. If she wants to reach the stage when I shall not recognize her if I meet her, you can tell her she is well on the way to it. If I did not need her for my new comedy I should not do so now."

On neither of these three occasions had I insisted on knowing more. His harshness, irony and violence made me a prey to a very strange fear. I apprehended with real anguish the moment when he would say in his own way. "It is all over. Madam de Bonnivet is my mistress." Under any circumstances it is saddening to receive such confidences. At least I have always felt it so. It is

so repugnant to me as to almost become painful. Is it a result of the prudery with which Jacques reproached me? Is it a persistent prejudice, the remains of a conventional imposition before the woman's modesty, as he also pretended?

I don't think I am either prude or dupe. I see rather, in this aversion for certain confessions which no longer allow any doubt as to certain faults, first of all an excess of jealousy—why not?—and then the drawing back before brutal reality which is in me a malady. Actually it is without a doubt a relic of respectable and pious youth, and the evidence that a woman who has been well brought up, who is married, is a mother, and holds a position, has degraded herself to the physical filth of a gallant adventure is intolerable to me. In its way this apprehension was the more illogical and foolish as my comrade's indiscretion had edified me as regards the flirting and coquetry of which Madam de Bonnivet was capable. Between coquetry, even foolishly light, and precision of the last detail there is an abyss. In conclusion, if ever Jacques came to pronounce to me that cruel phrase: "It is all over. Madam de Bonnivet is my mistress," I should have to see Camille with that phrase in my memory, and then the reply to her questions would become to me a real penance. To know nothing, on the other hand, was to retain the right to reply to the poor actress without lying to her.

This voluntary ignorance did not prevent me from realizing that the whole of Camille's drama

of sentiment was acted on this single point : on the degree of intimacy established between Molan and Queen Anne depended the sad remnant of happiness, the last charity of love which the poor child still enjoyed. So although I tried not to find out anything definite as to the result of the intrigue between Jacques and Madam de Bonnivet, I did nothing but think of it, multiplying the hypotheses for and against the latter's absolute downfall. Alas ! they were almost all for it. How was I to wait for the revelation which put an end to my uncertainty in a startling and entirely unexpected way ?

It was towards the close of a February afternoon. Camille had missed three set appointments without sending me a word of apology. I had spent several hours, not in my studio, but in a little room adjoining it which I adorned with the title of library. I keep there a number of books which a painter, caring for his art alone, ought not to have. Why is it that a poet and a novelist, even the most plastic, can teach an artist who must live by his eyes and the reproduction of forms ? It is true I was not engaged in reading but in dreaming, glasses in hand, before the half-burnt fire. The lamp, which had been brought in by a servant, lit up half the room. I abandoned myself to that nervous languor which resolves itself into, at such an hour, in such a season and such a light, a half unconscious semi-intoxication. Anything accidental in us is removed at such times. We seem to touch the bottom of our fund of sensibility, the nerve itself of the internal organ through which we

suffer and enjoy, and the pulp which composes our being.

I felt in the twilight that I loved Camille as I imagine one must love after death, if anything of our poor heart survives in the great mute darkness. I told myself that I ought to go and see her, that there was in the excess of my discretion apparent indifference. I evoked her and spoke to her, telling her what I had never told her, and what I should not dare to tell her. It was at the moment, when this opium of my dream-passion most deeply engulfed me, that I was snatched with a start from my dream by the sudden arrival of her who was its chief character. My servant, whom I had told that I could see no one, entered the room to tell me, with an air of embarrassment, that Mademoiselle Favier was asking for me, that he had answered her according to his instructions, and that she had sat down in the anteroom, declaring that she would not go without seeing me.

"Is she alone?" I asked.

"Quite alone," he answered with the familiarity of a bachelor's servant who has been in the same situation for twenty years—he saw my father die and I am quite familiar with him. "I must tell you though, sir, that she seems to be in great trouble. She is as white as a sheet; her voice is changed, broken, and choked. One would think she cannot talk. It is a great shame, considering how young and pretty she is!"

"Ah, well, show her in," I said, "but no one else, you understand."

" Even if M. Molan comes to see you too, sir ? " he inquired.

" Even if M. Molan calls," I replied.

The good fellow smiled the smile of an accomplice, which on any other occasion I should have interpreted as a proof that he had guessed the ill-concealed secret of my feelings. I did not have time to reflect upon his greater or less penetration. Camille was already in the studio, and the image of despair was before me, a despair verging on madness. I said to her as I made her sit down : " Whatever is the matter ? " and sat down myself. She signed to me to ask her no questions, as it was impossible for her to reply. She put her hand upon her breast and closed her eyes, as if internal anguish there in her breast was inflicting upon her suffering greater than she could bear. For a moment I thought she was about to expire, so frightful was the convulsive pallor of her face. When her eyes opened I could see that no tear moistened her blue eyes, eyes which were now quite sombre. The flame of the most savage passion burned in them. Then in a raucous and almost bass voice, as if a hand had clutched her throat, she said to me as she pressed her fingers on her forehead in bewilderment—

" There is a God, as I have found you. If you had not been at home I think I should have lost my reason. Give me your hand, I want to clasp it, to feel that I am not dreaming, that you are there, a friend. My sufferings are so great."

" Yes, a friend," I replied, trying to calm her,

" a true friend ready to help you, to listen to you, to advise you, and to prevent you, too, from giving way to your fancies."

" Do not speak like that," she interrupted, freeing her hand as she drew back with almost hateful aversion, " or else I shall think you are in the plot to lie to me. No. This man deceives you as he has me. You believe in him as I have done. He would be ashamed to show himself in his true colours before the honourable man you are. Listen." She seized my arm again and came so near me that I could feel the feverish heat of her rapid breath. " Do you know where I, Camille Favier, have come from ; I, the recognized mistress of Jacques ? I have come from a chamber where that wretch, Madam de Bonnivet, has given herself to him, where the bed is still in disorder and warm from their two bodies. Oh, what a hideous thing it is ! "

" Impossible ! " I murmured, overwhelmed with fright at the words I had just listened to and the tone in which they were spoken. " You have been the dupe of an anonymous letter or a fancied resemblance."

" Listen again," she went on almost tragically, and her fingers bit into my flesh, so furious was their grasp. " For a week I have had no doubt as to the relations between Jacques and this woman. Suddenly he had become tender to me with that tenderness which a mistress never mistakes. He was humouring me. There was a certain expression in his eyes when he looked at me. I would

have liked to snatch away that look to read what was behind it. Then I found around his eyes that voluptuous hollow I knew in him too well. I recognized in his whole being that exhausted languor which he used to have in the days gone by when we loved passionately, and he avoided our appointments. He always had an excuse to change and postpone them. You see, I am talking to you as I feel. It is brutal, but what I am telling you is true, as I have always told the truth to him and to you. It was I, you understand, who asked for these appointments, I who did the hunting, while he refused me and escaped from me. Is any other proof of a lover's deception necessary? But this week I began again to doubt. I received a visit from this woman's husband. She had the audacity to send him to me! He came with Senneterre to ask me to act at a grand affair they are having next Monday."

"I have an invitation to it," I interrupted, suddenly recollecting that I had received an invitation for it. "I was astonished at it, but I understand now. It was an account of you."

"Ah, well! you will not see me there," she replied in a tone which froze my heart, it was so ferocious, "and I have an idea that this function will not take place." Then with rising anger she said: "Now, see how innocent I am still! When the fool of a husband asked me that, and I said 'yes,' seeing that Jacques displayed no emotion, it seemed to me impossible that this woman could

really be his mistress. I did not believe it of her, nor did I believe that he was her lover. I knew she was a famous coquette, and you remember how I judged him? But this was on her part such insolent audacity, and on his shameful cowardice! No. Had you come yourself, even this morning, to tell me that she was his mistress, I should not have believed it."

She was so agonized at what she was preparing to tell that she had to stop again. Her hands, which had let go of me again, trembled and her eyes closed from her excessive suffering.

"And now?" I said to her.

"Now?" She burst into a nervous laugh. "Now I know of what they are capable, he in particular. She is a woman of the world who has lovers. But for him to have done what he has done! Oh, the wretch, the wicked monster! I am going mad as I talk to you. But listen, listen," she repeated in a frenzy, as if she feared I should interrupt her story. "To-day at two o'clock there was to have been a rehearsal of the new comedy by Dorsenne at the theatre. He is altering an act and the rehearsal was countermanded. I did not hear of it till I got to the theatre. For that reason I found myself about two o'clock in the Rue de la Chausée d'Antin with the afternoon before me. I had one or two calls to make in the neighbourhood. I started, and then some clumsy person trod on my skirt, tearing a flounce almost off. Look." She showed me that a large piece of the bottom of her skirt was torn. It happened

at the top of the Rue de Clichy near the Rue Nouvelle."

She had looked at me as she pronounced and emphasized these last few words, as if they ought to awaken in me an association of ideas. She saw that I made no sign. A look of astonishment passed over her face and she continued—

"Does that name tell you nothing? I thought that Jacques, who confides in you, would have told you that as well. Well"—she dropped her voice still lower, "that is where we have our place of meeting. When he became my lover, I should so much have liked to have belonged to him at his own place, among the objects in the midst of which he lived, so that at every minute, every second, these mute witnesses of our happiness would recall me to his memory! He did not wish it to be so. I understand the reason to-day; he was already thinking of the rupture. At that time I believed everything he told me, and did everything he asked me to do. He assured me that the rooms in the Rue Nouville had been fitted up by him for me alone, and that he had put there the old furniture from the room in which he wrote his early books: the room he lived in before moving to the Place Delaborde. How stupid I was! How stupid I was! But it is abominable to lie to a poor girl who has only her heart, who surrenders it entirely as well as her person and would despise herself for any distrust as if it were a crime! Ah! it is very easy to deceive any one who surrenders herself like that."

"But are you sure he deceived you?" I asked.

"Am I sure of it? You too—— she replied in tones of passionate irony. "Besides, I defy you to defend him when you hear the whole story. I was, as I have just told you, near the Rue Nouvelle with my dress torn. I must add, too, that in my foolishness I had left all sorts of little things belonging to me in the rooms there, even needles and silk. It had been one of my dreams, too, that this place might become a beloved refuge for both of us, where Jacques would work at some beautiful love-drama, written near me and for me, while I should be there to employ myself—as his wife! It occurred to me to go there and mend my torn flounce. I want you to believe me when I swear to you that there was no idea of spying mixed up in my plan."

"I know it," I replied to her, and to spare her the details of a confidence which I saw caused her great physical suffering, I asked her: "And you found the room in disorder as you told me?"

"It was more terrible," she said, and then had to remain silent for a second to gain strength to continue: "The way in which these apartments had been selected ought long ago to have told me that Jacques used them for others as well as me. They are in a large double house, the rooms face the street and are far enough from the porter's lodge for any one to ascend the staircase without being seen. What would be the use of all these precautions if I were the only person to go there? Am I not free? Am I afraid of any one but

mother seeing me enter? Then there was the porter's glances, his indefinable expression of politeness and irony, and his servility to Jacques, all of which would have proved to any one else that the rooms had been for years in his occupation. I can see it so clearly while I am talking to you! I cannot realize how I was so long deceived! But I am losing myself, ideas keep rushing into my head. I had got as far as the Rue Nouvelle with my dress torn. I had no key. Jacques had never given it to me in spite of my requests. What another sign, too! I knew that the porter kept one key so that he and his wife might look after the place. An inside bolt allowed, when once a person was inside, of the door being fastened against any intruder, so that very often Jacques did not trouble to take the second key which was kept in one of his drawers, and you may imagine I went to the porter's lodge as little as possible. I preferred, when I followed Jacques there, to go straight upstairs and ring. Without these details what happened to me would be unintelligible to you though it is so simple. This time I went to the lodge for the key. There was no one there. The porter and his wife were probably busy elsewhere, and the last person who went out had neglected to shut the door. I saw our key in its usual place and took it without the least scruple, and making as I did so a little motion of joy at avoiding the porter. I must repeat—I swear it to you—that I was absolutely ignorant of the incident I was about to encounter. I entered

the rooms with a certain feeling of melancholy, as you may imagine! It was a fortnight since I had been there with Jacques. The windows were closed. The little drawing-room with its tasteful tapestry and furniture was still the same, and so was the bedroom with its red furniture. I found out, on looking in a drawer where I had put my work-basket with my odds and ends, that it was no longer there, and I was somewhat astonished. But there was still a dressing-room and a little room which we sometimes used as a dining-room. I thought that perhaps the porter, when cleaning, had moved the things into the little room and forgotten to replace them. I looked there, found the work-basket, and began to mend my skirt. I took it off to do it more quickly. Suddenly I seemed to hear the opening of doors. I had taken the key out of the lock without shooting the bolt. My first thought was that Jacques was the unexpected visitor. Had he not told me, and I had believed him, as usual, that he sometimes came there to work out of remembrance of me and to assure himself more solitude? I had not time to give myself up to the sweet emotion this thought awakened in my heart. I could recognize two voices, his and the other woman's."

"The voice of Madam de Bonnivet?" I asked as she remained silent after the last few words, which were hardly audible. I was as much moved by her story as she was herself. She bent her head to signify "yes" and maintained her silence, so I dare not insist. The tragedy of the

situation, the facts of which she had placed before me so simply, crushed me. She went on—

"I cannot describe to you what passed in me when I heard this woman, who, thinking herself alone with her lover, was laughing loudly and talking familiarly to him. I felt a sharp pain, as if the keen point of a knife had wounded me in the inmost part of my being, and I began to tremble in the whole of my body on the chair upon which I was sitting. But even now at the thought, look at my hands! I desired to get up, to go to them, and to drive them away, but I could not. I could not even cry out. It seemed to me as if my life suddenly stood still in me. I heard and listened. It was a pain greater than death, and I really thought I should die where I sat! But here I am, and do you know the reason? In that small room where I stayed like that without moving, after the first moment of fearful pain had passed, I was overcome by disgust, by inexpressible repugnance and horror which was absolutely nauseating. Without a doubt if I had distinctly heard the words of this man and woman the need of immediate vengeance would have been too strong for me; but the indistinct, confused murmur, consisting of words I could hear and words I could not hear, combined with the picture of what I guessed was taking place on the other side of the wall, besides the unutterable suffering it caused me, gave me an impression of something very dirty, very ignoble, very disgusting, and very abject. There was one phrase in particular, and such a phrase which

made me feel that I despised Jacques more than I loved him, and at the same time—how strange the heart is!—I could only grasp the idea that if I entered the room he would think that I came there to spy upon him. That pride in my feelings ended by dominating everything else. I remained motionless in this small room for perhaps an hour. Then they departed and I went into the room they had just left. The bed was in disorder, but the pillows and bedclothes were the same. Ah," she groaned, uttering a cry which rent my heart, and pressing her fingers into her eyes as if to crush the eyeballs and with them a horrible vision of other infamous details which she would not, could not mention then she cried: "Save me from myself, Vincent. My friend, my only friend, do not leave me; I believe my head will burst and I shall go mad! Oh, that bed! that bed! our bed!"

She got up as she said these words, rushed towards me and buried her head against my shoulder, seizing me with her hands in an agony of supreme grief. Her face contracted and turned up in a spasm of agony, and I had only just time to catch her. She fell unconscious into my arms.

Without doubt this unconsciousness saved her, with the help of the torrent of tears which she shed when she recovered her senses. I saw her reawaken to life and realize her misery. Her confidences and the period of unconsciousness which followed them had moved me so deeply that I could find nothing to say except those commonplace words used to comfort a suffering person;

and there is such difficulty in making use even of those when one takes into account the legitimate reasons the person has for suffering. Camille did not allow me to exhaust myself for long in these useless consolations.

"I know that you love me," she said with an attempt at a broken-hearted smile, which even now when I think of it makes me ill, "and I know, too, that you sincerely pity me. But you must let me weep, you know. With these tears it seems to me that my folly departs. I would like only one promise from you, a real man's promise, your word of honour that you say 'yes' to the request I am going to make you."

"You believe in my friendship," I said to her. "You know that I will obey all your designs, whatever they may be."

"That is not sufficient," she said at my evasive reply, behind which, seeing her so excited, I had sheltered a last remnant of prudence. What was she going to ask me? And she insisted: "It is your word of honour I want."

"You have it," I told her, overcome by the sad supplication in her dear blue eyes from which the tears still flowed.

"Thank you," she said as she pressed my hand, and she added: "I want to be sure that you will not say anything to Jacques of what I have told you?"

"I give you my word of honour," I replied; "but you yourself will not be able to tell him."

"I?" she replied, shaking her head with grim

pride. "I shall tell him nothing. I do not wish him to suspect me of spying upon him. I will quarrel with him without giving a reason. I shall have courage against my love now from disgust. I shall only have to recall what I have seen and heard."

After her departure my heart-broken pity for her changed into increasing uneasiness. Was I to keep my word to the poor girl and not warn Molan? I knew too well the value of lovers' oaths to believe that, after assisting in concealment at this rendezvous between her lover and her rival, she would keep to her resolution of a silent rupture without vengeance. It is in vain for a woman to try and bear in her heart that sentimental pride, of which she had given proof in a very unlikely fashion by remaining in her hiding-place; she is still a woman, and sooner or later the pressure of her instinct will overcome her reason and dignity. If a fresh attack of grief overwhelmed the outraged mistress, would she not, when a prey to the delirium of jealousy, write the truth to her rival's husband? The look came to my mind which Bonnivet had given at his table the woman who bore his name and who was now the mistress of Jacques. How was it that this coquette, so obviously gaunt, so profoundly ironical, and so little impulsive, had given herself thus?

Curiosity to learn the details of this culpable adventure did not enter into the temptation which seized me directly Camille had gone to go and see my friend. At least I could warn him against

danger and a surprise likely to be tragic. I, however, resisted this desire, which was almost a need, of warning him through a point of honour which I have never yet failed to keep. That is the result of being the son of a Puritan. My father's words always came into my mind at times like this: "A promise is not to be interpreted but to be kept." I have this principle in my blood and marrow. I cannot recall circumstances when to keep a promise has cost me such an effort.

To remain faithful to my oath, I forbade myself going to see Jacques. He came to see me on the day following the day I had received his mistress' confidences which were so hard for me to keep. He had the previous evening been to the theatre to see Camille. He had not been able to talk to her because of her mother's presence. This presence, which was obviously at the daughter's desire, had astonished him a little; then he thought he noticed in the latter's eyes and also in her acting something strange, a sort of unhealthy excitement. As often happens when a person has not a clear conscience, this something had sufficed to make him uneasy. He therefore, had come to the studio with the vague hope of meeting Camille and the certain object of making me talk. His epigrams upon my part as eternal confidant were well justified. It is true that a very simple pretext offered an explanation of his visit.

"I have had an invitation sent you for Madam de Bonnivet's evening party," he stated after our greetings; "you will go, won't you? Shall we

dine together that evening? Has Camille told you that she is acting there?"

"Yes," I replied, "and I thought the idea was in somewhat doubtful taste."

"It was not my idea," he said with a laugh; "I am a little afraid of complications, and I avoid useless ones as much as possible. There are already too many unavoidable ones. Senneterre and Bonnivet arranged the party, one advising the other. They want to know the truth of my courting Queen Anne. Seeing that Camille is my mistress, they think that if Madam de Bonnivet is really her rival, the two women must detest each other. You follow their reasoning? In that case Madam de Bonnivet would refuse to have Camille there and Camille would refuse to go. I should also decline the invitation to avoid any meeting between the two women. But I accepted and so did Camille. Madam de Bonnivet placed no obstacle in the way. I should like you to have seen the stupor, and then the joy, first of Senneterre and then of Bonnivet. Ah! they are observers, analysts, and psychologists, like Larcher or Dorsenne. After this irony he added: "I have not seen Camille for some days. How is the portrait progressing?"

"You can judge for yourself," I hastened to say, only too happy to seize this pretext to avoid his questions, and I turned to show him the tall canvas upon which was drawn the slender silhouette of the Blue Duchess offering her flower—offering her flower to him who hardly looked at her. Has he ever given five minutes' attention to the artistic

efforts of a comrade? That day at least he had as an excuse his little inquiry to make, and thus his critical situation between his two mistresses rendered urgent. I was not offended when he continued, without the least gleam of interest lighting up the glance, almost a wandering one, which he fixed upon the picture.

"Is she still jealous of Madam de Bonnivet?" he asked.

"We have hardly mentioned that subject," I replied with a blush at my impudent untruth.

"Well, so much the better," he went on without insisting. "She would choose her time very badly. I must tell you that Queen Anne and I have recognized that we have made a misdeal and have given up the game. Yes, we are in a state of armed peace. We have measured our weapons and concluded an armistice. It was written that I should not seduce her and that she should not seduce me. We are good friends now, and I think we shall remain so. I like it better that way, it is more comfortable."

He looked at me, as he delivered this speech in a hesitating way, with a keen perspicacity before which I did not flinch. If my face expressed astonishment, it was at his assurance in the comedy. He no doubt attributed it to my surprise at his fresh relations with her whom he continued to call Queen Anne, and whom I knew deserved to be brutally called Anne the Courtesan. I realize today that in observing this strange discretion about his triumph he did not yield to a simple prudent calculation. Without a doubt he was prudent,

but he also counted on my thinking him sincere, and putting more energy into destroying my model's ever-recurring suspicions. There was, too, in this discretion succeeding the cynicism of his former confidences a singular turn in his self-conceit, which is more obvious now at a distance of time.

I have often noticed in the person whom women call in their slang "the man who talks" this anomaly. It is quite apparent. He tells you one by one, embellishing them where necessary, the least important preliminaries of an adventure with a person whose most trifling imprudence ought to be sacred to him. Then when he sees that you are qiute convinced that he is going to become that woman's lover, he defends himself at the last stage with a defence which compromises her as much as a positive avowal. This final silence prevents him from judging himself too severely. The same vanity which made him talkative before makes him silent afterwards. Vanity or remorse, calculation or a last remnant of honour, whatever was the cause of this sudden interruption in Jacques' confidences, it is certain that on this occasion he did not depart from his correct attitude of discretion. It made my discretion seem the less meritorious. But suddenly events were precipitated with the frightful rapidity of catastrophies in which discussions and half-confidences have no place. I should like to narrate this *dénouement*, not such as I saw it, but such as it was told to me. God! if I could reproduce for this story the natural and violent eloquence with which

little Favier used to retrace these tragic scenes, this clumsy narrative would live and become tinted with passion's warm tinge. Why did I not at once put it on paper in the form of notes, these burning avowals which so long pursued me ?

CHAPTER VIII

THERE is always a silent corner in a woman's most sincere confession. There was one in Camille's. In telling me, with the pauses of jealousy maddened by its certainty, of the dramatic discovery at the rooms in the Rue Nouvelle she had not revealed the whole truth to me. She had already resolved on an audacious plan for vengeance even at the time she affirmed that she would not revenge herself. She confessed to me later that she was afraid of my advice and reproaches. Among the phrases audible through the thin partition which separated her from the bed where her rival gave herself to their joint lover, she had seized upon a few words more important to her than the rest. It was the day and hour of their next meeting. This slender Madam de Bonnivet, in whom I had diagnosed signs of the most immovable coldness—a detail which in parenthesis Molan later on brutally confirmed—was like most women of this kind, a seeker after sensations. At each fresh intrigue those depraved women without temperaments persist in the hope that this time they will experience that much-desired ecstasy of love which has always shunned them.

I have learned since that it was she who, in spite of the danger, or rather because of the danger, had multiplied the meetings each of which risked a tragic termination. Camille had ascertained the secret of the real relations between the two lovers one Tuesday, and on the Friday, three days later, they were to meet at the same place. Knowing the exact moment of the appointment a mad resolution took possession of the suffering mind of the poor Blue Duchess: to wait for her rival at the door of the house, to approach her as she got out of her cab and spit out into her face her hatred and contempt there on the pavement in the street. At the thought of the arrogant Madam de Bonnivet trembling before her like a thief caught in the act, the outraged actress experienced a tremor of satisfied revenge. Her vengeance would be more complete still. The infamous trap into which Jacques and Madam de Bonnivet had lured her, the abominable invitation to perform at her rival's evening party to reassure the husband, would be of use to her. Out of prudence and with the idea of not compromising herself with her husband, Madam de Bonnivet must give her that evening in spite of everything. She, Camille, would appear there! She would see the woman who had stolen her lover tremble before her gaze, the lover himself pale with terror lest she should make a scene, and the fear of the guilty couple was in advance of those atrocious pleasures which hatred conjures up in the mind.

The three days which separated her from this

Friday passed for Camille in increasing expectancy. I did not see her during that time, for she took a jealous care in avoiding me, for fear I should derange her plan. But she told me afterwards that never since the beginning of her liaison with Jacques had she felt such a fever of impatience. She passed the night from Thursday to Friday like a mad woman, and when she left the Rue de la Barouillère to go to the Rue Nouvelle, she had neither slept nor eaten for thirty-six hours. At half-past three she was on the pavement in front of the windows of the rooms walking up and down wrapped in her cloak and unrecognizable through her double veil, never losing sight of the door through which her rival must go. There was at the corner of the Rue de Clichy a cabstand which she fixed as the boundary of her promenade. Each time she passed she noticed the clock on the cabstand. First it was twenty minutes to four, and more than twenty minutes to wait. Then it was ten minutes to four, and she had ten minutes to wait. Four o'clock struck. They were late. At twenty minutes past four neither Jacques nor Madam de Bonnivet had appeared. What had happened ?

In face of this delay, the more inexplicable as, in the case of a woman of position like the one for whom revenge was watching, her moments of leisure are few, it seemed obivous to Camille that the lovers had altered the time and place of the appointment, and the idea maddened her. They had seen one another so often since she had

listened to their caresses and familiarity so close to her. Who knows? Perhaps the porter had noticed her when she went out the other day, although she had taken advantage of a moment when he was absent from the lodge and talking in the courtyard to replace the key. Perhaps he had warned Jacques of the visit!

It was half-past four, and still no one had appeared. Camille was at last convinced that to remain longer watching was useless, all the more since, as happens at this time in a cold February day, a bitter fog had come down mixed with sleet, which made her shiver. She cast a desperate glance at the impenetrable windows with their closed shutters from which no gleam of light came, and was preparing to depart, when in searching the short street with her eyes for the last time she saw a carriage stop opposite the cabstand and a face look out of it which gave her one of those attacks of terror which dissolve the forces of the body and soul: it was the face of Pierre de Bonnivet!

Yes, it was indeed the husband of Molan's mistress, no longer in his laughable function as the shy and intimidated husband of a woman of the world who endured the coquetry of the woman who bore his name, submitting to it to profit by it. It was the assassin in his hiding-place, the assassin in whom jealousy had suddenly awakened the primitive male, the murderous brute, and whose eyes, nostrils, mouth announced his desire to kill whatever happened. He was there scanning the street

with savage glances. The half turned-up otter-skin collar of his overcoat gave to his red hair and high colour a more sinister look, and the bare ungloved hand with which he lifted the curtain of the window to enable him to see better seemed ready to grasp the weapon which should avenge his honour at once on that pavement, without any more thought of the world and of scandal than if Paris were still the primeval forest of 3,000 years before, where prehistoric men fought with stone axes for possession of a female clad in skins.

How had the jealous husband discovered the retreat where Queen Anne and Jacques took shelter during their brief intrigue ? Neither Camille, I, nor Jacques himself have ever known. An anonymous letter had informed him ; but by whom was it written ? Molan had at his heels a mob of the envious ; Madam de Bonnivet was in the same position, even without reckoning her more or less disappointed suitors. Perhaps Bonnivet had simply recourse to the vulgar but sure method of espionage. It is quite certain that the porter had been questioned, and but for the fact that he was a good fellow, who had been well supplied with theatre tickets by his lodger, and was proud of the latter's fame as an author, the rooms which had seen the poor Blue Duchess so happy and so miserable in turn without doubt would have served as the theatre for a sanguinary dénouement. It was indeed the desire for a tragic vengeance which Camille Favier saw upon the face, in the nostrils, around the mouth, and in the eyes of the man's

face she had seen at the carriage window in the dim light furnished by a gas jet in the darkness, looking for a proof of his dishonour, and decided upon immediate vengeance. It is very likely, too, that he had noticed the young woman. But he had only met her once off the stage, and the high collar of her coat, a fur boa wound several times round her neck, a hat worn over her eyes and a double veil made Camille into an indecisive figure, a vague and indistinctive silhouette. Bonnivet without doubt saw in her, if his fixed plan allowed him to reason at all, a wanderer of the prostitute class exercising her miserable trade as the darkness came on. Then he took no further notice of her.

As for the charming and noble girl who was so magnanimous by nature that it seemed a pity that she should have experienced such depraving adventures, she had no sooner recognized Bonnivet than her first spite, her furious jealousy, the legitimate sorrow of her wounded passion and her appetite for revenge all combined into one feeling. She realized nothing but the danger Jacques was in, and the necessity of warning him, not to-morrow, or that evening, but at once. A few minutes before she had made up her mind that the lovers had postponed their appointment till another day.

An idea suddenly pierced her heart like a red-hot iron; suppose they had only postponed the appointment till five o'clock? Suppose at that moment they were preparing to set out for this street, at the top of which this sinister watcher was waiting? The thought that, after all, that was

possible at once transformed itself, as often happens when the imagination works around the danger to a person beloved, into a certainty. She could distinctly see Jacques walking towards this ambuscade. The resolution to stop him at once without a second's delay possessed her with irresistible force. What could she do but hasten to the Place Delaborde, where she had a last chance of meeting Molan? She was afraid she would be noticed by Bonnivet, or he might hear her voice, if she took one of the cabs on the rank, so she hurried along the Rue de Clichy like a mad woman, calling cab after cab, and feeling, when at last she took her seat in an empty one, the horrible attack of a fresh hypothesis which almost made her faint. Supposing the two lovers had, on the other hand, put forward the time of their meeting and were in the rooms, while the husband warned by a paid or gratuitous spy was waiting for them? Camille could see them once more in her imagination, with the same inability to distinguish the possible from the real. Yes, she could see them, quite sure of their privacy, taking advantage of the gathering darkness to emerge arm in arm, and she could see Bonnivet rush and then . . . This unknown conclusion varied between sudden murder and a terrible duel.

The unfortunate creature had hardly conceived this second hypothesis, when a tremor shook her to her very marrow. Her cab had set off at a fast trot in the direction of the Place Delaborde. What could she do then? In these instants when not only seconds, but halves and quarters of a second

are counted, does real sentiment possess a mysterious double sight which decides persons with more certainty than any calculation or reasoning could do? Or are there, as Jacques Molan loved to say, destinies protected by singular favour of circumstance, which have constantly good luck, just as others constantly have bad luck? Still Camille, between two possibilities, chose by instinct that which turned out to be the true one.

At the precise moment that the cab turned into the Place de la Trinité she directed the driver to turn back to the Rue Nouvelle. Why? She could not have told. She stopped the cab and paid her fare at the top of this street. Her plan was made and she put it into execution with that courageous decision which danger sometimes inspires in souls like hers, passive on their own behalf, but all flame and energy in defence of their love. She could see that Bonnivet's carriage was still in the same place. Her umbrella up to protect her from the sleet was sure to hide her face as she walked bravely along past the carriage and reached the house, the door of which the jealous husband was watching. Her doubts were removed, for a stream of light through the cracks of the shutters denoted some one's presence in the rooms. She went in without hesitation and walked straight to the porter, who saluted her in an embarrassed way.

"I can assure you, mademoiselle, that M. Molan is not here," he replied when she insisted, after his first denial.

"I tell you he is here with a lady," she replied. "I saw the light through the windows." Then sharply with the inexpressible authority which emanates from a person really in despair she said: "Wretch, you will repent for the rest of your life of not answering me frankly now. Stop," she added, taking the astonished porter's arm and pulling him out of the lodge. "Look in that carriage at the corner of the street on the right and take care you are not seen. You will see some one watching the house. He is the woman's husband. If you want blood here directly when she leaves, all you have to do is to prevent me going up to warn them. Good God, what are you afraid of? Search me if you want to make sure I have no weapon and would not harm them. My lover deceives me, I know, but I love him; do you hear? I love him, and I wish to save him. Cannot you see that I am not lying to you?"

Dominated by a will stretched to its uttermost, the man allowed himself to be pulled to the door. Luck, that blind and inexplicable chance which is our salvation and destruction in similar crises, sometimes by the most insignificant of coincidences, that luck whose constant favour to the audacious Jacques I mentioned, willed that at the moment when the porter looked towards the carriage Bonnivet leaned out a little. The man turned to Camille Favier with an agitated look.

"I can see him," he cried; "it is the gentleman who the day before yesterday asked me some questions about the occupants of the house. He asked

me if a M. Molan lived here, and when I replied 'No,' according to orders, he took a pocket-book from his pocket. 'What do you take me for?' I asked him. I ought to have given the rascal a good hiding. Wait while I go and ask him if he has authorityfrom the police to watch houses."

"He will answer you that the street is common property, which is quite true," said Camille, whose coolness had returned with the danger. Was it the inspiration of love? Was it a vague remembrance of the usual happenings on the stage? For our profession acts in us like automatic mechanism in the confusion of necessity. A plan formed itself in her imagination in which the honest porter would take a part, she knew, for Molan knew the way to make himself liked. "You will not prevent that man from staying there," she went on, "you will only make him think there is something it is necessary to hide. He will make no mistake as to what that something is. Before coming here he must have received positive information. You want to help me to save your master, don't you? Obey me."

"You are right, mademoiselle," the porter answered, changing his tone; "if I go and make a scene with him he will understand, and if it is his wife, he has the right not to want to be what he is. I meant to have warned M. Jacques when he went upstairs that I had been questioned, but he came with that lady."

"I will warn him," Camille said, "I undertake to do so. Now go and call a cab, but do not bring it

into the courtyard, and leave me to act. I swear I will save him."

She ran upstairs while the porter called a cab as she had ordered him. The simple object, if there must be a drama, of doing everything to prevent it taking place in his house, had made him as docile as if Camille had been the owner of the house, that incarnation of omnipotence to the Paris porter. When the plucky girl reached the landing before that door she had opened so many times with such sweet emotion, she had, in spite of the imminent danger, a moment's weakness. The woman in her in a momentary flash revolted against the devotion love had suggested in such a rapid, almost animal, way, just as she would have jumped into the water to save Jacques if she had seen him drowning. Alas! she was not saving him alone! The image of her rival rose in front of her with that almost unbearable clearness of vision which accompanies the bitter attacks of the jealousy which knows it is not mistaken. Vengeance was there, however, so certain, so complete, so immediate and impersonal! It was sufficient to allow events to take their course down the slope upon which they had started.

When the poor child afterwards told me the details of this terrible day she did not make herself better than she really was. She confessed to me that the temptation was so strong that she had to act with frenzy and fury to put something irreparable between herself that moment, so she began to ring the bell at the door, first of all once,

then twice, then three times, then ten times, with that prolonged ring which gives an accent of mad insistence to the bell. She could see in her mind as clearly as if she were in the room the two lovers, attracted by the bell, first laughing at the thought that it was an inopportune visitor, then exchanging glances in silence, Madam de Bonnivet in affright, and Jacques trying to reassure her, as they both got up. How she would have liked to have shouted "quick, quick!" Then she began to knock repeatedly at the door with her clenched fist. Afterwards she listened. It seemed to her, for the over-excitement of her anguish doubled the power of her senses, that she could distinguish a noise, a creaking of the floor beneath a stealthy step on the other side of the still closed door; and applying her mouth to the crack of the door to make sure of being heard—

"It is I, Jacques," she cried, "It is I, Camille. Open the door, I beg of you, your life is in danger. Open the door, Pierre de Bonnivet is in the street."

There was no reply. She was silent, listening once more and asking herself whether she were mistaken in thinking she heard a footstep. Then still more maddened, she began again to ring the bell at the risk of attracting the attention of some other resident in the house; she knocked at the door and called out: "Jacques, Jacques, open the door!" and she repeated: "Pierre de Bonnivet is below!" There was still no reply. In her paroxysm of fear a new idea occurred to her. She went down to the porter, who had come back with

the cab, and who was now distracted and moaning in naïve egoism.

"This comes of being too good. If anything happens we shall get discharged. Where shall we go then? Where shall we get another place?"

"Give me pencil and paper," she said, "and see if the watcher is still there."

"He is still there," the porter answered, and seeing Camille fold the paper on which she had feverishly scribbled a few lines, "I see," he said, "you are going to slip the note under the door. But that won't get the lady out. If I had a row with the fellow, we should both be locked up, and while explanations were taking place she could escape and there would be no scandal in the house."

"That would be one way," Camille replied, though she could not, in spite of the gravity of the danger, help smiling at the idea of a struggle between the man of the people and the elegant sportsman Pierre de Bonnivet; "but I think mine is the better plan."

She rushed up the staircase once more, and after ringing the bell as loudly as before, she slipped under the door, as the porter had guessed, the bit of paper on which she had written: "Jacques, I want to save you. At least believe in the love you have betrayed. What more can I say? Open the door. I swear to you that B—— is at the corner of the street watching for you. If you look to the right you will see his carriage, and I swear to you, too, that I will save you."

What a note, and how I preserve it, having obtained it from Jacques himself, as a monument of harrowing tenderness! It is impossible for me to transcribe it without shedding tears. The sublime lover had calculated that sooner or later Jacques would have to come to the door to go out. She also told herself that she would stand against the staircase wall till, after reading her supplication, he opened the door. With what a beating heart she watched her white note immediately disappear! A hand drew it inside. She could hear the rustle of the paper as the hand unfolded it and the noise of a window opening. Jacques was looking into the street, as she had told him to do, to verify for himself, in spite of the increasing darkness, the accuracy of the information contained in the strange missive. To the poor Duchess, although she had indicated the method of verification, this proof of distrust at that moment was really like the probing of a wound, the most painful spot in a painful wound! She had no time to think of this fresh humiliation. The door opened at last and the two lovers were in the anteroom facing one another: Camille a prey to her exaltation of sacrifice and martyrdom so strangely mingled with contempt and almost hatred; he pale and haggard, and looking untidy from his hasty toilet.

"Come," he began in a low voice, "what is it? You know if you are lying, and have come to make a scene."

"Be quiet, wretch!" she replied without

deigning to lower her voice ; " if I were a woman to make scenes, should I have neglected the opportunity when you came here with her last Tuesday at three o'clock ? Yes, I was in that room, there behind the alcove, and I heard everything ; do you understand ? everything, I did not come out and I let you go. There is no question of that. The husband of that woman is at the corner of the street watching for you. You looked out of the window and saw the carriage. I don't want him to kill you in spite of what you have done to me. I love you too well. That is the reason I am here."

Molan had watched this strange girl's face while she talked. Suspicious though he was, that being the punishment of men who have lied to women too often, he realized that Camille was speaking the truth. Then he made a generous movement, his first. If he is an egoist, comedian, and a knave, he does not lack courage. He has several times, because of slanderous articles, fought very unnecessarily and very bravely. Perhaps too, for the idea of playing to the gallery is never absent from certain minds even in solemn moments, he was thinking of the report of the drama, if drama there was, which the newspapers would publish far and wide. A few words he said to me later make one think so : " You must admit that I missed a magnificent advertisement ! " But who can tell what the thought at the back of his head was, and perhaps after all those words were only the after-thought of a man of his kind

to conceal his rare natural outbursts. Still, adjusting his jacket and taking his hat from a peg in the anteroom, he answered in a loud voice—

"I believe you and thank you. It is enough. I know now what I have to do."

"Do you mean to go down?" she said. "You are going to meet danger? Will that save you, answer me, when you go and ask that man—what? What he is doing there? It would be sacrificing this woman, and you have no right to do so. If Bonnivet himself followed you, he saw a woman enter. If he had you followed, he knows that a woman is here. He must see a woman leave with you in a cab and conceal herself. He must follow the cab and leave this street clear for her to escape during that time. Ah, well! you must go out with me. There is a cab waiting. I have had it fetched. We will get into it; do not refuse and do not argue. Bonnivet will see us do so and will follow us in his carriage. He will expect to surprise you with her; he will surprise you with me, and you will be saved." She took him in her arms unconsciously, then pushed him violently away from her and went on in a low voice: "We are almost the same height, go and ask for her cloak. She will take mine and go five minutes after us, after she has seen her husband's carriage go. Wish her good-bye, and be sure she does not come to thank me. If I saw her I might not be able to control myself."

She took off her long black cloak as she spoke and handed it to Jacques, who received it without a

word. Certain women's sacrifices have a magnificent simplicity which crushes the man who receives them. He can only accept them and be ashamed. Besides there was no time to hesitate. Necessity was there, implacable and inevitable. Jacques went into the drawing-room into which the anteroom opened, while Camille remained standing against the wall in the outer room. "I had a knife in my heart," she told me afterwards, "and also a savage joy at the idea that I was overwhelming her by what I was doing; it was a sorrowful joy. I also loved him again, and I have never loved him so much as at that moment. I realized how pleasant it is to die for some one! At the same time I was obliged to master myself to prevent entering and insulting this wretch, tearing her chemise and striking her with my hands. Oh, God, what moments they were!"

While this miracle of love was taking place in the commonplace surroundings of this abode of love, the darkness had come. The street noises penetrated into this anteroom with a sort of sinister far-away sound, and the poor actress could hear a whispering quite close to her, the discussion taking place in the other room between the traitor for whom her devotion was meant and the accomplice in his treachery. At last the door opened and Jacques reappeared. He had his hat on his head and his fur collar turned up to conceal half his face. He had in his hand Madam de Bonnivet's astrakhan jacket which Camille put on with a shudder. It was a little too large for her at the

breast. "I thought she must be more beautiful than I am in spite of her slender appearance," she said to me when telling me of this very feminine impression, and it was another puncture in her wound.

"Come," Jacques went on after a period of silence. He watched her put on the jacket with an expression in which appeared the last gleam of that distrust, the first sign of which had been the opening of the window after the note to make sure that Bonnivet was really there. They descended the staircase without exchanging a word. At the lodge, while Jacques was telling the porter to call another cab as soon as the first had gone, Camille fastened her double veil over her face and slipped into the cab, hiding her face with a muff which she showed to Jacques once the door was shut.

"It is my poor plush muff," she said jokingly to make his courage return by this proof of her coolness. "It does not go very well with this millionairess' jacket. But at this distance and this time in the evening it will not be noticeable. Look through the window at the back of the cab and see whether the carriage at the corner of the street is following us."

"He is following us," Jacques said.

"Then you are saved," she replied. She pressed his hand passionately, in her clasp allaying the anxiety of the cruel moments which she had been through and burst into tears. He could still find no words to thank her, and to relieve

his embarrassment he tried, as he had often done when they were in a cab together, and had had a quarrel, to put his arm round the young woman's waist, draw her towards him and snatch a kiss. His movement brought back her furious hatred and jealousy, and repulsing him fiercely she said—

"No, never, never again."

"My poor Mila," he said, calling her by a pet name he used in moments of passion.

"Don't call me that," she interrupted, "the woman of whom you are talking is dead, you have killed her."

"But you love me," he insisted. "Ah! how you love me to have done what you did just now!"

It was her turn to make him no answer. The cab reached the top of the Rue de Babylone without the two lovers exchanging any other words than this question which Camille asked from time to time: "Are we still being followed?" and Jacques' reply: "Yes."

This furious pursuit by the jealous husband displayed such an evident resolve for vengeance that the actress and her companion felt again the anguish they had already experienced—she when she recognized the face of the watcher at the window of the stationary carriage, he when the sound of the bell surprised him in Madam de Bonnivet's arms. Would the husband be duped by the plan Camille had thought out? The fact of his waiting till their cab stopped to approach

the two fugitives testified to his uncertainty, or else, sure of not losing sight of the cab, he preferred to have an explanation with the man whom he believed to be his wife's lover in a more out-of-the-way place, where he would alight. At last Camille recognized the church of Saint François Xavier which reared its two slender towers through the mist.

"Here is a good place to stop," she said as she tapped for the driver to do so. "You will see the other carriage stop too and Bonnivet get out. He will rush towards us, and then we shall need all our coolness. Let me get out first, and if he asks why we conceal ourselves like this, talk of mother."

It was one of those rapid scenes, which the actors themselves, when they recall them, think they have dreamt, and do not know whether they have experienced a sensation of tragedy or comedy. Life is like that, oscillating from one to the other of these two poles with an instantaneousness which has never been expressed, I think, by any writer and never will be. The change is too sudden. At the moment Camille set foot upon the pavement at the foot of the church steps, she saw Pierre de Bonnivet suddenly rise up before her; he took her arm and suddenly recognized her.

"Mademoiselle Favier!" he cried. Then he stopped, quite out of countenance, while Camille in terror cowered against Molan who had by this time also got out of the cab, and who, as if surprised at recognizing the man who had rushed toward

his mistress, cried in a voice in which there was a tremor—

"Why, it is M. de Bonnivet!"

"Good gracious, mademoiselle," Queen Anne's husband stammered after a moment's dead silence, "I must have seemed very strange to you just now, but I thought I recognized some one else." In his hesitation a sudden, immense and unhoped-for joy quivered. The jealous husband had a proof that his suspicions were false. "I thought I recognized the friend of a friend of mine, and in Molan the friend himself. You will excuse me, will you not? What would have been a joke to her becomes to a person like yourself, whom I admire so much, and with whom I am so little acquainted, an unpardonable familiarity."

"You are quite forgiven," said Camille with a laugh, adding with as much presence of mind as if she had pronounced the phrase on the Vaudeville stage in the course of an imaginary crisis, instead of finding herself face to face with a real danger: "I live quite close here. I asked the famous author to see me home after rehearsal, and I had scruples about letting him return alone and on foot to civilization. I am going to get into my cab and leave you my cavalier to accompany you, M. de Bonnivet. Molan will explain to you that a woman can be an actress and a simple ordinary woman as well, very simple and very ordinary. Good-bye, Molan; good-bye, sir."

She bowed her pretty head coquettishly, enveloping the two men in her lovely smile, and

made towards the left side of the church where the sacristy was, while Jacques said to Bonnivet putting his finger to his lips—

"Because of her mother, you know."

"I understand, you bad boy," the other man replied with a hearty laugh. He continued to feel that gaiety of deliverance, so sweet as to be almost intoxicating, on emerging from a torturing crisis like the one he had just been through. He could have kissed where he stood the lover of his wife, whom he had all day been planning to kill, and he pushed him into his carriage, which was splashed with mud right up to the box through this fierce pursuit across Paris, saying as he did so: "Where shall I drop you? You know your Mademoiselle Favier is quite charming, with such distinction of manner too! She had such a way, too, of justifying her drive with you! Mind, I am asking no questions. I will apologize again to her when she is acting at my house. You might do so, too, for me, if you don't mind! A likeness, you know, and at that hour a mistake is so easily made."

CHAPTER IX

THE emotion experienced by Camille during this dramatic adventure, suddenly determined upon, thanks to her presence of mind, in a theatrical catastrophe, had been so strong that directly she was out of sight of the two men she felt like fainting. All she could do was to get into a cab and drive to the Rue de la Barouillère. There a real attack of nervous fever prostrated her and made her go to bed. So it was not from her that I learned this episode in which she played a part so naturally, spontaneously, magnanimously, and generously. It was a noble part which suited the noble heart revealed by her beautiful blue eyes, by her proud mouth, and by her well bred and charming personality! Otherwise, had she been well enough to get out, on the day following this dreadful day she would have hastened to me to complete her sorrowful confidence of her first surprise by her second confidence of her heroic sacrifice for her most unworthy lover. But persons capable of acting as she had acted do not boast.

It was Molan himself who first told me the details of these almost incredible scenes—at least those

he knew, Camille herself having since completed them. The subtle feline person had two reasons for making me acquainted with this adventure, in which he still played a flattering part—current morality being taken for granted—of a man loved to distraction by one of the most elegant and courted women in Paris, and to martyrdom by one of the prettiest actresses not only in Paris but in Europe. The first of these two reasons was his natural fatuity, and the second his interest. He was afraid that after such an experience the devotion of the Blue Duchess would shrink from another ordeal, that of acting a comedy at the house of the rival she had saved. Now he considered, not without good reason, that Camille's presence at Madam de Bonnivet's party was the indispensable conclusion of the scene in the Place Saint François Xavier. The husband's suspicions must have been strongly aroused to have gone to the extremity of espionage, and there was no answer to this phrase with which Molan completed his disclosure.

"As long as Bonnivet does not see these two women face to face. his suspicion may be again aroused, and suspicion is like apoplexy, the first attack can be cured but there is no remedy for the second."

His theory was right. But while he retailed it to me, as a conclusion, my thoughts were only for the real drama he had just narrated. I can still hear myself crying, "Oh, the wretches!" When he described to me Camille in the anteroom of

the suite of rooms, while Madam de Bonnivet was listening to her repeated ringing of the bell, pale with terror, I can realize to-day that this story of Jacques' was most indelicate on his part, for he must needs begin by this phrase. "First of all I will tell you the whole truth. I am Madam de Bonnivet's lover." I was no longer astonished at my colleague's cynicism. When he had finished, the misery of this adventure overwhelmed me with sorrow, and there were tears in my voice when I asked him—

"And after that you want Camille to act at that woman's house?"

"She must," he replied, "and I am relying upon you to ask her."

"Upon me," I cried, "you must be mad."

"Not a bit," he went on. "It is very simple. While listening to you she will only think of the risk I have run and say 'yes.' That is the a. b. c. of jealousy."

"But if she refuses. You seem to think she has no malice against you."

"Not a bit," he replied with his frightful smile; "either I am quite ignorant of the human heart, or else she has never loved me so much, since I have never treated her so badly."

"If she does not tell me the story you have just told me, how am I to turn the conversation?"

"She will tell you; then be the first to begin. Confess that I have told you in the madness of my emotion and remorse. It will not be a lie, for it is a fact that in the cab yesterday while I looked

at Camille sitting in her corner with fixed gaze and excited face, I would have given everything to love her at that moment as she loved me. Explain that; I was not thinking of the other woman. I called upon the latter to-day. What a woman, my dear friend, and how the crack of the whip of danger made her vibrate! I found her with her husband after breakfast, and he left us together after a quarter of an hour's affectionate talk, which proves that his suspicion is at any rate a little allayed. That man does not know how to pretend. Lately he has hardly shaken hands with me. We did not abuse his complaisance and we were right, for I met him returning home, as I was leaving twenty minutes later, to find out how long my visit had lasted. There was just time for Anne to give me the two or three most indispensable items of information. You admire Camille's courage, don't you? But what will you say to the presence of mind of this great lady who was indeed risking something, her life perhaps, her honour without a doubt, her position and everything which constitutes her reasons for existence. Do you know where she went when she was able to escape. She drove straight to a furrier's, where she purchased an astrakhan jacket as like the other one as possible. She had no money to pay for it and did not like to leave her name. The idea struck her to go to her jeweller and borrow the money. She pretended that she had lost her purse, and then returned to the furrier's to pay for her jacket, picked up

her own carriage, which she had left at a friend's house and ordered to meet her outside the shops near the Louvre, and reappeared at home dressed as she was when she went out. These are the true details. Would you believe them? Her visit to the jeweller's and furrier's moved me very much. How frightened she must have been at risking them. Now all she has to do is to tell her maid a lie to account for the difference of jackets. A mistake after calling or trying on, that is all. But every fresh little lie is a new landmark if the husband pursues his inquiries. This man would shrink from questioning the servants. That is what saved us this time. He will have had me followed, not his wife, but I was imprudent enough to accompany her to the rooms. My luck makes me frightened," he added seriously, after being silent for a time.

"Yesterday's discovery has, all the same, not destroyed Bonnivet's jealousy, I repeat, since he returned home during my visit, and if Camille does not keep her promise his suspicion may be aroused again."

"But with this distrust and the knowledge he possesses of your rooms," I said, "your appointments will not be very easy to make."

"It is for that reason that Madam de Bonnivet will not fail to keep one now. She is a curious and bored woman, and her commonplace adventure with me has at last given her the tremor," he added smilingly. "Ah, ah, she is of the same nature as the divine marquis to some extent. But you

don't understand these things at all, my dear boy. As for the address of the rooms, the fact that Bonnivet knows it will make no difference. Having seen me leave there with Camille, he will never believe me capable of taking the other one to the Rue Nouvelle."

"You will go on then without any fear?"

"Yes. I was frightened yesterday when I heard the ringing and knocking at the door, and I repeat that I am sometimes afraid of my luck. It is as stupid as believing in the evil eye, but the feeling is stronger than I am."

"There is no doubt that in Camille," I replied, "you have met the only woman in Paris capable of such an action. If you had even a little bit of heart, you would spend your life in making her pardon your infamy."

"My dear boy," he interrupted, "then you will never understand that she only loves me like that because she understands that I do not love her. Then," he added, shrugging his shoulders, "without doubt it is a question of personality, I desire the other one and I do not desire Camille. This explanation of love is not brilliant, and if the abstractors of quintessence who subtilize upon the sentiment, like your friend Dorsenne, gave it in one of their books, they would lose their feminine clientele, their twenty-five thousand skirts I call it. I myself am neither an analyst nor a psychologist, and I maintain that this explanation is the true one."

"So he told you everything!" Camille said

ironically when I saw her the day after this conversation. I had written to her, to be sure and not miss her. I found her pale with eyes burning from insomnia. She was in the little drawing-room in the Rue de la Barouillère, which always looked so commonplace, poor and grey, while its canvas-covered furniture gave it the appearance of a room prepared for moving. "Did he boast also of the delicacy with which his wretch of a mistress thanked me? Here," and she handed me a leather case with her monogram upon it, C.F., which I had noticed her fingering nervously for five minutes. I opened the case, which contained, glistening upon black velvet, a massive gold bracelet incrested with diamonds. It was one of those jewels in which the work of the goldsmith is reduced to a minimum, and of which the brutal richness makes the present an equivalent of a cheque or a roll of sovereigns. I looked at the bracelet, then I looked at Camille with a look in which she could read my surprise at the method employed by Madam de Bonnivet to pay her for her devotion.

"Yes," the actress went on, and, in a tone of disgust which made me ill, she repeated: "Yes, that is the object which came this very evening with my coat. It is my medal for bravery," she sneered. "My first object as soon as I go out will be to give the wretch a lesson in delicacy!"

"Be content with returning the jewel through Jacques to her," I suggested. "A scene would be too unworthy of you. When a person has

the whip hand, which you most certainly have, it is wise to keep it to the end."

"No," she proudly said, "there will be no scene between us. I would not have one. I will go and sell the bracelet to a jeweller, then I will go to a church, spend the money in charity, and Madam de Bonnivet will receive with her jacket two little pieces of paper—one the jeweller's bill, and a note from the priest saying, 'Received for the poor, from Madam de Bonnivet, so much.' This infamous adventure will at least have served to put a fire on a fireless hearth and a loaf of bread on an empty table."

"Suppose the husband is there when the messenger arrives?" I asked.

"She must explain it the best way she can," Camille said, and a gleam of cruelty passed into her blue eyes, which deepened in colour almost to black. "Do you think I should have moved my little finger to help her the day before yesterday, if it had not been necessary to save her to save Jacques? Ah! that Jacques has not even called to inquire after me this morning. He knows, too, that I have not acted for two consecutive evenings. He knows me and that emotion makes me ill. Vincent," she added, taking my hand in her feverish grasp, "never love. It is such madness to have a heart in this cruel world. From Jacques I have not even had a note, two words upon his card, the little sign of politeness one owes to a suffering friend."

"You are not just," I told her, "he fears to

face you. It is very natural. He is too conscious of his faults, and, you see, he has sent me to find out how you are."

"No," she said, shaking her head dolefully, "he came to see you, because he needed you for something. Confess to me what it was? From the first I told you that you do not know how to lie or scheme. Oh, God! how nice it would be to love some one like you, not in the way I love you, as a friend, but in the other way! Come, confess that you have a commission from Jacques for me."

"Well, yes," I replied after a second's hesitation. There was such uprightness in this strange girl, such a rare nobility of sentiment emanated from her whole being! To finesse with her seemed to me a real shame. I therefore gave her, simply and sadly, Jacques' message: simply, because I reckoned, and rightly, too, that the surest way to influence her was to state the facts without any phrasing; sadly, because I felt the hardness of this new demand of Molan's. I also realized its necessity. When I had finished, tears came into her blue eyes.

"So," she said, with an even more bitter expression and a disenchanted smile, in which there was much love, though it was for ever poisoned by contempt, "he has thought of that, to save this woman again! He finds that I have not sacrificed myself enough. Besides, it is logical. When one has begun, as I did, one must go on to the end. I will go." With her forehead crossed

by a wrinkle of resolution, her eyes hard, and her mouth ugly, she went on: "Very well, Vincent. You have repeated his words to me, and I thank you. That must have cost you something, too! You owed me that frankness. You promise to exactly repeat mine to him, do you not? Tell M. Molan, then, that I will act at Madam de Bonnivet's as is arranged. Yes, I will act there, and no one, you understand, shall suspect with what feelings. But it is on one condition—tell him that, too, and if he does not keep it, I will break my promise: I forbid him, you understand, I forbid him to write or speak to me from this time onward. He will talk to me at that woman's house just sufficiently to prevent anything being noticed. That must be all. I shall not know him afterwards, you understand. After this last act he is dead to me. Perhaps I shall really die myself," she added in a stifled voice, "but it is all over between us."

She made a gesture with her hands as of tearing up an invisible agreement. Her eyes closed for a moment. Her features contracted with a twitch of pain, and then this creature, so feminine in her grace and mobility, assumed a tender look and a gentle smile as she got up and said to me—

"Leave me now, friend. Don't come to see me again before I let you know. We will finish the picture later on. I love and esteem you very much, and feel real sympathy for you. But," her voice was stifled as she concluded, "but I

must forget, all the same, to try and live." Then with a proud little inclination of her blonde head and a courageous shrug of her slender shoulders, she concluded: "I am not to be pitied. I have my art left."

I knew that Camille was incapable of breaking a promise made with such seriousness as to be almost solemnity. She had that trait common to all persons, men or women, who attach great importance to their feelings: a fastidious scrupulousness in keeping unwritten agreements, reciprocal engagements. Therefore I insisted with the greatest energy upon Jacques conforming strictly to the condition which the actress had imposed upon him, and I myself, great though the cost was to me, had the courage to observe with the greatest rigour the programme of absence and silence, the wisdom of which I understood. Around certain moral fevers, just as around certain physical ones, there is darkness, suppression of motion, and a total suspension of life. In spite of my absolute faith in Camille's word, I was not without uneasiness when I repaired a few days later to Madam de Bonnivet's party. I knew that the poor Blue Duchess, if not quite restored to health, was at least well enough to reappear at the theatre. When I say that I followed the programme drawn up by her with the greatest rigour, I must add that I allowed myself once to go and see her act without, as I thought, breaking the agreement, since she did not see me sitting in the pit, and I had a feeling of relief at seeing that there was no

difference in her acting. I came to the conclusion that she had taken to her art again, as she had said to me, to that cult of the theatre which had been the naïve enthusiasm of the dreams of her youth. I hoped that that love which never deceives would cure the wound made by the other. But in the carriage which conveyed Jacques and I to the club, where we again dined together, this confidence gave place to apprehension, in spite of my companion's optimism, he having become once more a person of an imperturbable assurance. which seemed born to manœuvre in false situations,

"I am curious," he said to me, "to know what she has prepared for her audience of swells. She has promised the great scene from *La Duchesse Blue* with Bressorè, and then a few monologues and imitations. You don't know her in that light, do you? She has like every actor or actress her monkey side."

"Imitations!" I repeated. "Fashionable people are admirable. They no sooner have in their hands an artist of talent than they become possessed of a single idea, to degrade that talent by forcing the possessor to become a plaything for them If it is a painter like Mirant, they order from him portraits with a disgusting want of expression to put upon bon-bon boxes! If he is a man of letters like you, they make him write bad prose and verse at a moment's notice! If he is a musician, he has to produce a piece for the piano at once! In the case of an actress like Camille,

with ardour, temperament, and passion, they make a parade of her. Good God, what foolishness it is! What is going to happen to-night?"

"Would you prefer," sneered the dramatic author, to hear the plaints of Iphigenia or of Esther proclaimed ten paces away from a buffet laden with *foie gras* sandwiches, punch, orangeade, chocolate and iced champagne? On my word of honour you seem to me admirable! But if you had the lightest tint of that transcendental irony, without which life does not present the slightest savour, you would find it exquisite that my pretty Blue Duchess has saved the honour, and perhaps the life, of my adorable Queen Anne, and that they met face to face—one playing her part as a fashionable Parisian hostess, respected and worshipped; the other giving her performance before an audience of the idle; while I myself am the third person. My only regret for the beauty of the situation is that I did not have an appointment with both during the day. Would you believe it? Since these happenings I desire Camille again, and I would retake her if I did not fear to spoil her masterpiece. Yes, the masterpiece of her rupture For she has discovered it; there is no denying it. If André Mareuil had not laid down his humorous pen to become a Commissioner of Police, if he were still writing his *Art de rompre* instead of drawing up regulations, I should submit the case to him. Have you ever thought of a more divine method of a mistress ridding herself of her lover and leaving in his mind

an exquisite memory? That is the ideal end of love."

"Try at least to be ashamed of your egoism," I interrupted. I realized that he was amusing himself by making my *naïveté* display itself, and that he was joking. But actually the fact that he was unable to jest on such an occasion angered me, and I continued, touching his breast as I did so: "Have you, then, absolutely nothing there but a ream of paper and a bottle of ink, for the idea of this love, devotion and sorrow, only to inspire you with one more paradox instead of bringing tears from your eyes?"

"One must never judge what is visible," he replied with sudden seriousness which contrasted strangely with his former flippancy. Did he conceal in an inner fold of his heart, poisoned though it was with social vanity, commercial calculations and literary ambitions, a tender corner, too small to be ever exalted into complete passion, but sufficiently alive to sometimes bleed, and had I touched the secret wound? Or was his one of those complicated natures which keep just enough sensibility to suffer because they have no more? These two latter hypothesis are not irreconcilable in such a complex nature. They would at least explain the anomaly of a talent for accurate human observation, being associated with such implacable hardness of heart and a systematic and utilitarian depravity of mind. Never had the astounding contrast between Jacques' person and his work struck me as it did in that rapidly moving

carriage. He was the first to break a silence which had lasted for a few minutes by saying—he was without doubt replying to a thought my reproaches had suggested to him—

"Besides, if it were to begin again, I should have prevented that party. It is useless. I don't know what fresh information Bonnivet has received, but he is charming to me and his wife. I found both of them the other day examining two ornaments their jeweller had just brought. In parenthesis, what do you think of this conjugal scene? She was clasping around her neck a necklace of pearls and looking at herself in the glass, while her husband said to me—to me!—as she showed me another one: 'Which one do you prefer?' She experienced a keen pleasure at this high comedy scene. I saw that her eyes were shining like the pearls in the necklace. At what price had she purchased this renewal of confidence?"

"But," I said, "did not a scene like this, and the conclusion you drew from it, make you take your hat and stick and go away, never to return?"

"You are not, and never will be, intellectual, my dear boy," he replied. "Understand that there is a sort of bitter and ferocious joy in despising what one desires, just as there is in enjoying what one hates. That is how Queen Anne holds me fast, perhaps for a long time, just as I hold her fast by the attraction of the danger involved. We have already, since the affair, revisited the rooms in the Rue Nouvelle; would you believe it? Decidedly there is no tincture of cantharides like fear?"

"That is folly," I cried, "to tempt fate like that!"

"Quite right," he said with a shrug of the shoulders, "but one must live to write. There is a play in this story, and I will not miss it."

We reached Madam de Bonnivet's house, and found a long string of carriages already in the street. I was to find a great difference between the almost familiar reception of the other evening and my reception now. It seemed as if Jacques had in those few minutes tried to give a complete representation of the different phases of character of this human lighthouse. While we ascended the carved wooden staircase, with its wealth of pictures, busts, tapestry, and ancient stuffs, he whispered to me this last expression, which had nothing cunning nor dandified about it, but was simply the childish vanity of the middle-class gentleman engaged in a love affair—

"You must admit that my friend is not badly housed?"

I am quite sure that at that moment the carpets upon which his pumps rested warmed a secret place in his heart. I am certain that the lustre on that staircase illuminated the darkest depths of his snobbish conceit. I am sure that a conqueror's pride swelled his chest as he said to himself in these luxurious surroundings: "I am her lover." He had become during the last few weeks too transparent for this shade of his sensibility to escape me. Each of his words was like the striking of a clock, the works of which are in a glass

case. When the sound strikes the ear one can see the little cogwheels bite the large ones and the complicated mechanism at work.

The hall doors had opened, and Jacques and myself were at once separated. The spectacle, which this room, vaulted like a chapel and unknown to me, and the two drawing-rooms opening from it presented, awakened the painter in me, the man used to vibrating by a look. In a corner of the hall a little platform had been erected, which was empty just then. There were perhaps fifty women sitting with a like number of men, all in evening dress, and the women's jewels sparkled in their blonde or dark hair and on their naked shoulders. The entire range of colours was displayed in these various toilettes, which were heightened by their contrast with the black coats and the details which had on my first visit to this house so displeased me, the too composite character of the decorations, blended and harmonized as they were in this light with the aid of the moving crowd. Fans were waving, eyes shining, faces were animated by questions and answers, and Queen Anne, towards whom I went to pay my respects, really had in her white evening dress the majestic air of a princess worshipped by her courtiers.

As I approached her, I thought of the mortal peril she had been in the other week. There seemed to me no more trace of it in her pale azure eyes than there was of jealousy upon Bonnivet's beaming face. For the first, and, without doubt,

the last time in my life, I was supplied with positive information about a fashionable intrigue. Usually one does not know the history of these fine gentlemen and beautiful ladies except from a vague "they say." A woman is suspected of having so and so for a lover, and a man is suspected of having so and so as his mistress. This suspicion, which to people of their class is equivalent to certainty, is not reduced to exactness. The street and number of the house where they meet is not known. It is not known under what circumstances they start for the rendezvous. A door remains open to doubt, and if not open it is ajar.

As I bowed to Madam de Bonnivet and received her greeting in the form of an amiable commonplace, I could see this haughty head on the pillow in the chamber of adultery, and the terror of her disturbed features when the continuous ringing of the bell and the repeated knocking at the door had warned her of her danger. The contrast was so sharp that for the first time I understood the unhealthy attraction which this to some extent double existence exercises over certain imaginations, and why women or men who have tasted these sensations no longer find any relish in others. Such profound and perilous deception procures something like an evil intoxication, the pleasure of a really superior and almost demoniac hypocrisy, to the man or woman who lie in that fashion. To this kind of infernal falsehood belonged the phrase which Madam de Bonnivet used to close our rapid and uninteresting conversation.

"There is some one who would not forgive me for detaining you any longer," she said, and the point of her fan indicated a direction which my glance followed. I saw Camille Favier, whom at that moment Jacques was approaching. "Go and speak to her," she continued, "and tell your friend Molan that I have a little commission for him while I think of it."

I was prepared, on arriving that evening, to encounter much coolness in this woman, who was depraved by coldness a coquette through egoism, and curious even as regards vice through idleness. I had not even thought the audacity of such a phrase addressed by her to me who knew everything possible. In spite of my firm intention not to allow my impressions to appear, she read my astonishment in my face. Her half-closed eyes darted at me the most incisive look which has ever fathomed the soul of a man to its depths. Without doubt, regarding her liaison with Molan, she thought I had only one of those hypotheses, which I was unable to verify, one of those hypotheses which grow around those so-called mysteries, Parisian love affairs, and that I could not very well conceal my deductions. The acuteness of her eyes became dulled into indulgent irony, and I left her to obey the order she had given me, but in part only. She had obviously calculated, with her habit of relying upon the evil sentiments of her intimates, that I should be only too happy to convey her message to Jacques in Camille's presence, to make their quarrel all the worse and

put my friend in a somewhat false position. She was to find out that a good fellow of a painter did not lend himself to this pleasantry. I approached the two lovers as if the beautiful enemy of the pretty actress had not entrusted me with any commission. They were only exchanging, according to agreement, the most indispensable polite phrases in a loud voice—

"Have you come to this corner of Bohemia, then?" Molan said, my presence restoring his natural assurance to him; "it is quite natural that you should."

"Do not boast," I replied in a tone of banter with a foundation of truth to it similar to the one he affected. "It is a long time since you passed as a man of the world."

"Big words!" he said still gaily. "I am off. Don't talk too much ill of your friend Jacques, and do not monopolize her too much," he added, turning to me; "she must do a little flirting to be a success with the men."

He went away with the renewed desire, of which he had spoken to me, shining in his eyes. Camille had bowed as he went without speaking, but with a smile in which I, who knew her so well, could read so much suffering and disgust. She fanned herself nervously, while I looked at her with an emotion which I did not endeavour to conceal. We were in our out-of-the-way corner like two outcasts, though our sorrowful *tête-à-tête* was very brief! Senneterre was already on his way towards us from the other end of the hall

with a young man who had asked to be introduced to Camille. Those two minutes sufficed for us to exchange a few phrases which redoubled my impression of danger. It had continually increased ever since I had entered the house.

"So you are come," the actress said, "thank you;" and in a supplicating tone she added: "Do not leave me this evening, if you love me a little."

"Don't you feel well?" I asked.

"I have presumed too much upon my strength," she replied. "I was quite well up to the moment I was presented to this woman and heard her voice. Oh! that voice! Then Jacques came in, and I felt ill. Look, he is going to her. They are talking, and are alone. Go and tell him that he must not trample too much upon my heart. I am exhausted, and can bear no more."

She pronounced these last few words hesitatingly, and forced herself to smile, a convulsive smile like a nervous tremor. I do not think that I have ever seen her so beautiful. The absence of jewels in the midst of these well-dressed women and the simplicity of her toilette in these luxurious surroundings gave her something like a tragic character. I had no time to reply, for the professional "beater" was there with his stereotyped phrase—

"Mademoiselle, allow me to present to you my young friend, Roland de Brèves, one of your most passionate admirers."

"With what selections are you going to charm

us with this evening, mademoiselle ? " the young noodle asked Camille, who was still vibrating with emotion. " It is rare good fortune to hear you in society ; Madam de Bonnivet will make many people jealous."

" Really there is no occasion for it, sir," Camille replied, and to correct his impertinence added : " I shall give a scene from *La Duchesse Blue* with Bressoré, and then three or four fragments. Besides, your curiosity will soon be satisfied, for I can see Bressoré coming. He was acting this evening in the new play, but he has got away early. What luck ! "

" What good fortune for us," her questioner said, " who will hear you all the sooner ! "

" No," she brutally said, " for me to be able to go to bed all the sooner."

She turned her back on the young man, who was disconcerted by the harshness of this strange reply, to exchange a few equally amiable words with another gentleman who greeted her. The insolence of the phrases she uttered, she who was usually so gracious, proved quite well that she was hardly mistress of herself. Of what an outburst she would be capable if Madam de Bonnivet, as her attitude towards Jacques at that moment made me fear, gave too bold a display of coquetry. My anxiety was suddenly borne to its highest pitch. I understood that in insisting upon Camille figuring at this party, the cruel woman had not only proposed to put her husband's suspicions at rest for ever. For that she relied upon

other weapons. The dominant trait of her implacable nature was vanity, and this vanity wished to have the actress at her mercy, to revenge herself for the two humiliations she could not forget—the insulting heroism at the rooms, and the return of the bill for the bracelet with the receipt from the priest of Saint François Xaviers.

Wounded in her most secret susceptibilities, she had promised herself that for two or three hours she would keep her rival, who was then in her employ, at her house, to inflame her again and again with the most poignant and powerless jealousy, and leave herself free to pardon her after the punishment and forget her, and also the man of letters whom she had taken from the actress. He had already ceased to interest her, now that he no longer represented another women whose happiness she wished to steal. She would soon give proof of it, and also that the fop was bragging when he thought that he had awakened her to the pleasure of love. In spite of so many and such disturbing emotions, she had left his arms as insensible, as far off as ever that total ravishment by person which metamorphoses a coquette into a slave and enslaves her to the man who has initiated her into this complete intoxication. She acted, however, during this evening as if she had loved Jacques. The desire of torturing the woman by whom she had been so strangely saved and wounded was strong enough in her blasé heart to equal physical pleasure. I gained this evidence upon the spot by watching her in the

distance talking, while I was making my way towards the spot where she was laughing with Jacques, though my progress was interrupted at intervals by Machault, further on by Mirant, and then by Bonnivet.

The first of the three said to me: "I have not seen you at the school of arms lately. You missed the Italian fencer, San Giobbe. He is really wonderful."

"You did not tell me the other day," the second said, "that you were painting Camille Favier's portrait. It is very underhand of you to treat your old master in that way!"

"Ah well, M. La Croix," Bonnivet asked, "are you going to hang anything at the next exhibition?"

I felt inclined to answer the incorrigible fencer: "It is not a question of assaults, parade and laughable combats; do you not see that there is a prospect of a real duel, actual sword thrusts, and the sacrifice of some one's life?" To my dear master I felt inclined to say: "I shall not make you sell a picture more, shall I? Why play the part with me of a protector who is interested in the work of one of his pupils? Spare me this comedy, and let me try to prevent a catastrophe." To the husband I would like to have said: "If you had watched over your wife more carefully in the beginning she would not be what she is, and this drama would not be enacted in your drawing-room." In place of those replies, in each case I uttered a few vain, untruthful words. My

desire was to reach Jacques soon enough at least to prevent him being in the vicinity of Madam de Bonnivet while the acting was going on. Perhaps I should succeed, as I was only a couple of paces away from him, when Queen Anne, as if she had guessed that I was this time bearing a message from her rival and should deliver it, decided to call me, and said in a tone of imperceptible raillery—

"Let me present you to the woman in Paris who knows most about the primitive Italians about whom you were talking to me the other evening."

"Really, sir," the person to whom I was to be thus linked, an insupportable blue stocking, whose name, if my memory does not deceive me, was Madam de Sermoise, said, "do you admire those idealist masters who are so little appreciated in our days of gross realism? But we shall return to them, and to a noble and lofty art. You have been to Pisa, of course, to Sienna, to San Gemigorano and Perugia?"

O sweet little red and golden towns of lovely green Tuscany, which indent with your towers the heights of the slopes planted with vines and olives! O generous artists with whom I lived so long, and whose visions are to me still my soul's daily bread! Pardon me if I blasphemed your memory and your cult in replying as I did to the odious pedant. I declared to her that her hostess was making fun of her. I told her that I was a member of the grotesquely modern school of art. But my indignation did not last. Madam de Bonnivet had

just asked Camille Favier and Bressoré to begin. She gave the signal for the guests to take their seats before the space reserved for the two actors who were to play; and she made Jacques Molan sit by her side, saying loud enough for me to hear—

"Every honour shall be shown to the author!"

Then followed a few moments of general disturbance of couches and chairs, the occupation of the seats by the women, leaving almost all the men to stand, and the gradual establishment of silence. In the midst of the last of the whispering came the sudden sound of the voices of the two performers, the dialogue, and the discreet applause of the audience of people of leisure; but I hardly noticed the details so did my heart beat, and does still to-day, at the recollection of that long-past hour.

Knowing as I did the minutest expressions of Camille's mobile face, the slightest shades of her gestures, the most tenuous inflections of her voice, I had realized from the first words of the scene that she had lost control of herself. Madam de Bonnivet had seen it too. She affected, while bowing her head at the fine points and being the first to applaud, to lean towards Jacques a little too far, to speak to him in low tones, and render him that public homage which was the simple politeness of an admirer of the fashionable author! But to Camille, the wronged and desperate mistress, the insolence of this attitude was too atrocious, and it was impossible for the actress to bear it without taking her revenge. I believed at

first that she would try to humiliate her formidable rival by her success, so much eloquence and passion did she display in the short scene she was acting.

After that was ended, when she was asked to recite one or two pieces, I thought she would restrict her vengeance to sharing a little of her success with two of Jacques' colleagues, of whom he is jealous, unless she chose these two poems because in reciting them she was also solacing her own poor deserted heart. One of these poems was by René Vincy, and the other was an unpublished sonnet by Claude Lacher which I had copied for her. Dear Claude! How beautiful Camille was while she recited this elegy which had for me so many moving souvenirs of my dead friend's sorrow. She recited one or two other pieces, and then quickly and in a joking way which reassured me for a second, she began to give those imitations which are always ignoble and sometimes vulgar. The divine Julia Bartet, the suffering and finely vibrating Tanagra in *Antigone*, the supple and poignant Réjane in *Germinie Lacerteux*, the pathetic Jane Hading in *Sapho*, the sprightly Jeanné Granier and the tragic Mathe Brandès were in turn the pretext for a mimicry which testified to a study of the art of these famous artists so profound as to be almost a science, and to that monkeyish frolic of which Molan had spoken, till having announced Sarah Bernharat in *Phèdre*, a shiver went through my whole frame.

She began and I suddenly recalled *Adrienne Lecouvreur* and the scene in which the actress,

seeing Maurice de Saxe, whom she loved, flirting with the Duchess de Bouillon during a drawing-room performance, recited those same lines of Racine's and ended by applying to her in a loud voice the imprecation of the poet's incestuous queen. Had Camille, an actress like Adrienne, in love, too, like her, like her betrayed under circumstances which I suddenly realized were very similar, coolly premeditated the same vengeance? Or did the excess of her anger inspire her all at once with this manner of outraging her unworthy lover and his mistress? I could distinctly see now upon her face a terrible intention, and I listened to her with my eyes fixed upon Jacques as she uttered that admirable line—

"The heart is full of sighs it has not uttered."

But her overpowering emotion already prevented from imitating the accent of the admirable Sarah. She pronounced in her own way and on her own behalf the poet's lines, and advanced to the edge of the little stage with the denunciatory gesture which is in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*. Her arms were pointed towards Madam de Bonnivet. She darted at her enemy a look of mad jealousy as she uttered the irreparable words—

"I know my wickedness Œnone, and am not one of those bold women who, enjoying in crime a shameful peace, have learned to keep an unblushing face."

CHAPTER X

I HAVE often seen *Adrienne Lecouvreur* acted, since that evening whose events I am recalling, with a tremor of the heart simply at the remembrance of the anguish I felt while Camille was performing this mad action. I have always noticed that the audience are gripped by this scene. As regards myself, both before and after the performance by Camille upon the improvised stage at Bonnivet's house, this scene has always moved me so that I found the action indicated by the book quite natural—I had the curiosity to consult it. Adrienne continues to advance towards the princess, to whom she points with her finger, remaining some time in this attitude, while the ladies and gentlemen who have followed her movements rise as if in affright. It was without any doubt a similar effect on the audience of terror, for ever dishonouring to her rival, that the despised mistress had, in a flash of blind passion, resolved to produce at the risk of the most terrible consequences.

I awaited this terrible effect with as frightful a certainty as if I could see in Camille's hand a

loaded weapon pointed at Madam de Bonnivet. To-day, when my mind goes back to those moments in which my heart leapt with apprehension, I cannot help smiling. Every one of the audience without doubt knew *Adrienne Lecouvreur* if not like I did, at least well enough to recall the situation which was so dramatic as to be easily intelligible. Every one had trembled at the Théatre Français when they saw Sarah Bernhardt or Bartet advance towards the Princess de Bouillon as Camille advanced towards Madam de Bonnivet. But, except those who were directly interested in this scene, not one of the audience appeared to understand the young actress' sinister intention.

No one, I am certain, instituted, between the scene being enacted before them at that moment and the one they had seen acted ten or twenty times at the theatre, a comparison which would have been a revelation. The actress herself, stupefied at what she had dared to do and the results, mechanically continued the tirade as if in a dream. Automatically, too, the tones of Sarah Bernhardt came back to her as she concluded. She stopped amid a most flattering murmur from all sides, the discreet applause of the fashionable before a wonderful feat marvellously executed. One could hear such phrases as : " Very life-like ! Shutting your eyes you would think you were listening to Sarah ! How gifted the little one is ! It is not given to every one to possess talent like that ! "

Madam de Bonnivet, who had been the first to clap, had got up and gone to Camille, to whom she

said with a smile, the amiability of which was her crowning insolence—

"Exquisite, mademoiselle, exquisite. I am very grateful to you. Was it not exquisite, Molan? Will you give Mademoiselle Favier your arm and take her to the buffet?"

Really I am not suspected of sympathy for the audacious woman whose abominable coquetry had exasperated the poor actress to the extent of this astounding insult. But I must do her the justice to admit that she had really a majestic way of thus bringing to naught Camille's justice. I distinctly heard her voice pronounce the phrase in spite of the hum of conversation and the noise of the moving of chairs and couches, and I saw Camille look at her with a somnambulist's look, and also give her arm to Jacques in quite a passive and subdued way. Her astonishment at daring what she had dared and at nothing happening had left her incapable of reply, feeling or thought. She was like a murderess who had fired at her victim and seen the bullet rebound from his forehead, without even inflicting a scratch. She had not, nor had I, a mind sufficiently disengaged to perceive in what had taken place a proof among a thousand that an irreducible difference separates the life presented upon the stage from the life which is really lived. She was the victim of an attack of nerves which first showed itself in this astonishment, or rather bewilderment, and almost immediately afterwards by a fit of half convulsive laughter which wounded me severely.

I gladly left the spot where she was with Jacques surrounded by men who knew her and were paying her compliments. I came across Bonnivet directly. His forehead was red, its veins swollen, his eyes were clear and at the same time flaming, and these things with the tremors through his whole body suddenly caused the fear I had felt a few minutes before to return to me. Even if to the rest of the audience the insult hurled in the fashionable lady's face by the actress had passed unnoticed, a circumstance which was explained by the fact that they had no notion of Jacques' position between his two mistresses, the husband himself had perceived this insult, and it required all his self-control to swallow the affront as he had done. He listened, or pretended to listen, to Senneterre, whose volubility showed that he, too, had understood the significance of the scene acted by Camille, and that he was trembling with fear lest Bonnivet also understood. The husband was automatically curling his moustache with his right hand, while I felt sure he was digging the nails of his left, which was hidden, into his chest.

I was not the only one to feel that this man was in a fury, nor to notice his forehead, eyes and gestures, which displayed the obvious signs, to a painter, of a formidable moral tempest. I saw the group of gentlemen near which I was dissolve to make room for Madam de Bonnivet, who was approaching her husband. In the same way that a little while before she had found a smile of supreme contempt, with which to congratulate Camille

Favier and reply to the insult of an atrocious allusion by the insult of an implacable indifference, now she found a tender and affectionate smile to reply to her husband's suddenly aggravated suspicions. She brought him in her gracious and affectionate smile an indisputable proof of her clear conscience. The sensation of her presence was necessary to this man at the moment and she had realized this, and also that the physical reality of her voice, of her look, of her breath, the evidence, too, of her tranquillity would impose upon her jealous husband a suggestion of calmness. Serenely radiant in her sumptuous white toilette, her eyes clear and gay, a half smile upon her pretty mouth, and fanning her lovely face with a gentle little motion which hardly disturbed the golden hair upon her brow, she walked towards him, hypnotizing him with her look. I could see at her approach the unhappy man's face relax, while Bressoré, whom I knew, took my arm and whispered in my ear—

"How smart she is! But, La Croix, as you are a friend of Favier's, I hope you will make her understand that her way of conducting herself this evening is very bad for me and for all of us! Why this is a house where we are received like swells, and yet because she is jealous of the mistress of the house and Molan, she behaves like a fool and treats her as Adrienne Lecouvreur did! I saw it coming and I saw it pass, and now I have not a dry stitch of clothing on me. It did not strike home, it is true, but it might have done so. But

then if the audience did not understand, the husband and wife did. I tell you this house is closed to us for the future. They have had their fill of acting at home by this time. Frankly, put yourself in their place, it would not do at all, would it? I am not more straight-laced than most, and I have my fancies, but I always behave in a gentlemanly way."

The comic plaint of the old actor, who was trembling for his social status, put a note of buffoonery into the adventure. I soothed the old man to the best of my ability, assuring him that he was mistaken, though without hope of convincing him. What a fine picture he would have made, with his mobile blue eyes looking out piercingly from his clean-shaven face, over which seemed to float an everlasting grimace! He had so much and such astounding good fortune that his glance upon the real bad side of life was like that of a diplomat. His countless mistresses had so well instructed him in the particulars of Parisian fashionable and gay life that he was no longer the dupe of any one or anything. He nodded his head incredulously at my protests and replied to me with the inherent familiarity of his profession, in spite of the principles of breeding he had just professed with such solemnity.

"You know, my dear fellow, La Croix, I am a very good boy and I like to try and give pleasure by appearing to believe what I am told, but I can't swallow that!"

Our little conversation had taken us, the actor

and myself, into a corner of the drawing-room near the hall door, which was open. I judged that poor Camille would not be long in leaving, and that the best thing would be for me to wait for her outside and speak to her then so that Bonnivet's eyes would not be fixed upon us during our talk. If no unfortunate accident happened I felt sure that now Queen Anne would arrange to definitely withdraw from the intrigue. I was quite sure, too, that Jacques would not be the one to end the affair. I knew his self-control. He would not betray himself. I knew that outbursts like Camille's are at once followed by prostration, and I felt sure that she had allowed herself to be taken to the buffet like a cowed animal. Senneterre and Bressoré, the other two witnesses who had understood all the secrets of this scene, were not the men to let their perspicacity be apparent. One loved Madam de Bonnivet too sincerely, the other was too preoccupied in playing his part as the correct artist. Only I myself was likely by my nervousness to betray my knowledge. I therefore glided between two groups towards the staircase, and as I was doing so felt my hand seized. It was Molan, who said in a jerky voice—

"Let us leave together. I want to speak to you."

"I am going at once," I replied.

"So am I; the coast is clear, let us be off."

We went downstairs without exchanging a word. We put on our coats in silence under the critical eyes of the footmen. It was not till we

reached the street that Jacques said to me, while he clutched my arm with a force which proved his anger—

"Were you present at the scene? Did you see what that infamous actress dared to do to me?"

"I saw that she had her revenge," I told him. "Frankly, you well deserved it, both you and Madam de Bonnivet. But still it had no consequences and no one perceived her intentions."

"No one? Did you take Madam de Bonnivet for a fool, and her husband too? Do you think he did not see through it all? As Camille knew, too, his jealous disposition after the risk she had seen me run, it was infamous, I tell you, it was abominable. But I will teach her that I am not to be laughed at like that," he went on with increasing violence. As he uttered this threat he turned back towards the house we had just left, and I had to hold him back by the arm while I said—

"Surely you are not going back there to make a scene?"

"No," he said, "but I know the driver of the carriage she uses for her evening engagements, I engaged him regularly for her. I have always been so good to her! I will stop her carriage. I will punish her here in the street. It is her proper place, and I will tell her so."

"You will not do that," I interrupted him taking up a position in front of him and speaking in a low voice. Now I was afraid of the curiosity

of the drivers who were sitting on the boxes of a long string of carriages.

"I will do it," he replied, beside himself, and just at that moment the porter called a carriage and we heard a name which caused Molan to burst out into a laugh, that of Camille herself.

"I beg of you," I said to the madman, "if you have no regard for Camille think of Madam de Bonnivet!"

"You are right," he replied after a short silence, "I will control myself. But I must speak to her, I must. I will get into the carriage with her, that is all."

"But if she will not allow it?"

"Allow it!" he said with a shrug of the shoulders. "You shall see."

A carriage had left the rank while we were talking, a shabby hired brougham. Its commonness contrasted strangely with the other vehicles which were waiting in the long street. The time this carriage took to enter beneath the archway and emerge again from it seemed to me interminable. If my companion allowed himself to be disrespectful to Camille I had made up my mind what to do.

At last the carriage reappeared and a woman's form was visible through the window, wrapped in a cloak with a high collar which I recognized only too well. It was Camille. Jacques called out to the driver, who recognized him, and was on the point of pulling up when the window was let down and we could hear the actress call out:

" 23, Rue Lincoln, don't you hear me ? Do you take your orders from that gentleman ? " Turning to me she said : " Vincent, if you do not prevent that individual," and she pointed to Jacques, " from trying to get into my carriage I shall call the police." The silhouettes of two policemen appeared quite black in the light of the lamps, and though the dialogue had been short the sound of the voices had made some of the men sitting on the boxes of the other carriages lean forward. In the face of this threat Jacques dare not turn the handle of the carriage door on which he had his hand. He stepped back and the carriage drove away while Camille's voice repeated in a tone I shall never forget—

" 23, the Rue Lincoln, as fast as you can go."

" Ah, well ! " I said to Jacques after a short silence, as he was standing motionless upon the pavement.

" Ah, well ! She guessed what was waiting for her," he replied sharply, " and she fled. Make your mind easy, the opportunity is only put off, not lost entirely. But why can she be going to 23, Rue Lincoln ? "

" It is an address she gave haphazard," I said, " to make you jealous and make you think she was going to keep an appointment. She will give another order to her driver as soon as she is round the corner."

" Still we can go there and see for ourselves," he replied. ' If she has already taken a lover

and allowed herself to play the trick she has done on me, you must admit that she is a hussy."

"No," I replied, "only an unfortunate child whom you have ill-treated and driven mad. If she has taken a lover, that will only prove that she is the victim of one of those despairs which women have, when everything seems dark. Such an action sometimes lead to suicide though it has not done so in her case, for she is too proud."

We got into a passing cab as we were talking, and in our turn started off in the direction of the Rue Lincoln. My only idea now was to find out whether the unkindness of which she had been a victim had not projected her into some horrible calling. The phrases she had uttered to me during my first visit to her modest abode in the Rue de la Barouillère, on the temptations of luxury for her came back to my mind, and I listened to Jacques the philosopher once more in a sort of stupor. Libertines of his character never accept, without the most sincere indignation, the appointment of a substitute by the mistress they have most coldly betrayed. Still less do they allow any one to see their humiliated spite. Jacques had ceased his complaints in order to converse on ideas, and he did so with his usual lucidity. It is the gift of intelligences trained to speculate to work in a mechanical way through every shock. Molan, I believe, will dictate copy, and good copy too, in his death agony!

When our cab reached the Rue Lincoln Jacques peered out with a more passionate nervousness

than suited his dandyism to see if there was any carriage standing in that short street. He saw the light of two lamps. Our cab approached and we could see Camille's carriage standing before a small house the number of which was 23. The carriage was empty and the driver had got off the box to light his pipe at one of the lamps.

"The lady told me not to wait," he replied to the question Jacques asked him, accompanied as it was by a tip of louis just as the heroes of the old school of romance used to do. My companion's anxiety was very great at this reply, though less than mine. We stood for a minute looking at one another.

"We will find out," he said and called to the driver to stop at the nearest café; "we will consult the *Bulletin*, and if that is not successful we will go to the club and look at the *Tout Paris*. We shall then know from whom mademoiselle seeks consolation, which you must admit she has done very rapidly and I expect even before her misfortunes. It is not very flattering for masculine love, but every time a man has any remorse at deceiving a woman, he can assert that he is a dupe and that she had already begun."

As he said this he jumped from the cab before it had quite stopped, alighted on the pavement in the Rue François I, and entered a café the only occupant of which was a waiter asleep on a seat. Without waking him Molan picked up the *Bulletin* from the counter, the cashier being absent at the time, and with a hand which trembled a little

pointed out to me the two following lines: Rue de Lincoln, 23—Tournade, Louis Ernest, gentleman."

"Was I right?" he said with a grin. He shut up the *Bulletin* and put it back on the counter adding: "You must admit that I deserved better treatment."

"I will admit nothing till I am sure of it," I replied, so deeply distressed by this fresh happening that I trembled all over.

"Sure of it?" Molan cried with insolent bitterness. "Sure of it? What do you want? Perhaps you would need to see them in the same bed? Then you would still doubt! But I am not a member of the sect of the pure-minded, I believe that Mademoiselle Favier is the mistress of M. Tournade, and I repeat that in that case the scene which she made this evening is one of the most miserable actions of which I have ever heard tell. I will be revenged. So good-bye."

He left me after these expressions of hate without any attempt on my part to detain or calm him. I felt crushed by an enormous weight of sorrow. I have never in my sentimental life known that jealousy which most books describe, that agonizing, feverish uneasiness about a perfidy which one suspects without being certain. I have never loved without confidence. It seems to me that women ought to be scrupulous of deceiving men who love them in that fashion. I have discovered that it is not so. Should I commence to , for again I should comfort myself in the same waylove

the simple reason that a person cannot see with his eyes full of tears. In return, if I have never been jealous in that uneasy and suspicious fashion, I have experienced that other sorrow which consists of having in one's heart something like a perpetually bleeding open wound, the evidence of having been deceived. I have known what it is to suffer for entire nights at the idea of a woman's body being given up as a prey to another man's luxury. This horrible oppression, this interruption of the inmost soul, this deadly shudder in the face of certainty, is, I believe, the worst form of sentimental disorder, and this suffering I have just experienced again with some intensity in reading the name of Tournade in the address book!

Oh, God! how miserable I was when I got back to my residence on the Boulevard des Invalides after walking all the way to quiet my nerves! It was in vain that I told Molan that I was not sure Camille was the mistress of the cad whose impure face had been so repulsive to me in her dressing-room at the Vaudeville, for there was no room in me for doubt on the subject. It was so simple. The unhappy child had lost her head. Excess of anger and sorrow had deranged her, and in a moment of delirium she had executed that scheme of revenge which would degrade her for ever. What am I saying? She had executed the plan! She was doing so even at the moment on that night when I saw the stars shining above my head between the walls of the houses. That hour, these minutes, those seconds, whose length I felt, and

whose flight I measured, she also lived and employed. How?

The sensations with which this idea blasted me must be, I should think, those of the man condemned to death and of his friends who love him during the time which separates his awakening on his last morning and his execution. He feels a desire to arrest the passage of time, to even throw the world, and for the earth to open, houses to fall, and a miracle to be accomplished. With what anxiety he then feels that life performs its functions in us with the implacable accuracy of a machine! All our moral and physical agonies, our revolts and surrenders, have no more influence upon nature than the flutterings of an insect in the furnace of a locomotive.

"It is over! She is Tournade's mistress!"

Those frightful words, which I knew to be true, I pronounced despairingly as I walked along the Rue François I, over the Invalide's Bridge, and then along the Avenue de la Tour Maubourg. Transcribing them now, even after such a long period, gives me pain; but it is a dull pain, a tender melancholy. With it is mingled a thoughtful pity, like that which I should feel when standing before Camille's tomb, instead of the bitter nausea of anger and disgust which seized me when I first realized the certainty of the event. Must I have loved her without knowing it, or at least without knowing how much, for thinking of her as I did to be such a penance!

As soon as I reached home, and before going to

bed, I wished to looked at the two portraits I had drawn of her: the first of her before she knew Jacques, the one I concealed so carefully; the second of the month previous with an unfinished smile. These two pictures made her so present to me, and made the defilement which sullied her at that moment so real, that I recollect in the solitude of the studio uttering real groans, like those of an animal with a death rattle in its throat.

My grief relieved itself by such outbursts that my servant was awakened. I saw with surprise this good fellow enter the room to ask if I were ill and needed his services. It was a grotesque incident which had at least one advantage, it put an end to this period of semi-madness. I should smile at this childishness after so many months if, alas, I did not find in it one more proof of my personal fatality, a sign of that destiny which has always refused me the power to fashion events after my own heart. Idolizing Camille as I did with such tenderness, ought I not to have told her so before? Should not I have arranged so that her first movement, if she desired to raise an impassable barrier between Jacques and herself, would have been to come to me? Who knows? I should then have realized with her the romance of which she had dreamed and which she had failed to realize with Molan! I should have shown such cleverness, such passionate tact, such caressing adoration in dressing her wound, that perhaps one day she would have loved me! Ah, it is the sorrow of "the might have been"!

How true those lines of the painter poet Rossetti were of me, and how suitable for my tomb—

> "Look in my face, my name is: Might have been!
> I am also called: No more, Too late, Fare thee well."

I spent that night almost without sleep, only in the morning having a feverish doze during which I dreamed a strange dream. I seemed to be sitting at table during a big dinner. I had facing me Camille dressed in red with her golden hair upon her bare shoulders. Near her was my unfortunate friend, Claude Larcher, whom I know is dead, and whom I knew was dead then at the time I seemed to see him alive. Although we were at table Claude was writing. It caused me infinite anguish to see him writing these lines, holding his pen in a way I knew only too well. It struck me that as he were ill such an effort would be fatal. I wanted to call out to him to stop, but I could not do so, as I was threatened with her finger by Camille, in whose eyes I discerned an absolute order not to say a word. I understood at the same time that the letter written like this by Claude was meant for me. It contained advice about Camille, and I knew it was of such pressing interest that waiting was a punishment which increased when the guests rose from the table and I saw Larcher go away with the letter without giving it to me.

I set out to pursue him through an infinite maze of winding staircases. To descend them more quickly I jumped into space and rebounded as if wings had raised me till I found myself in a

garden which I recognized as being that of Nohant, though I had never been there. I observed with astonishment the beautiful order of the beds, in which the flowers were planted so as to trace letters, and in astonishment I read the phrase which Jacques had used to me : "She had already begun." At that moment a burst of laughter made me look round. I saw Camille with her hair still on her fine shoulders and very pale in her red dress. She took to Tournade a note which I knew to be the one written by Claude. The fat man was lying in bed, his face still redder than usual, and he smacked his lips together with the sensuality of a glutton who has an appetizing dish set before him. It was then, at the moment when Camille began to unfasten her dress to get into bed, that the grief became unbearable. I understood that she was about to give herself to him for the first time. I wished to run to her and again the same fearful immobility entirely paralysed me and I awakened bathed in perspiration.

No sooner had I awakened from this painful sleep than an idea took possession of me. Perhaps this visit to Tournade on the previous evening had not been followed by a irreparable lapse ? Is it not an every-day occurrence for a woman to accept an appointment, keep it, and at the last moment be seized with a feeling of revolt, defend her person with fury and go away, having protected herself with an energy as mad as her inconsistent conduct. Why had I not admitted that hypothesis the previous evening, and why did I admit it now ?

I had no other reason than this dream. It was enough to make me get up hastily at eight o'clock and hurry to the house in the Rue de la Barouillère. Happily or unhappily, for a little uncertainty at times means a little hope, at the moment I knocked at the lodge window to ask if, in spite of the early hour, Mademoiselle Favier was at home, I saw in the lodge a servant who had several times accompanied her to my studio. This woman had opened the door to me on my first visit. She had been present at Camille's birth, as I knew, and was her confidant. As soon as she caught sight of me she ran out of the lodge with a haste which redoubled my fears.

"Ah! M. La Croix,'' she said as she pulled me towards the stairs so as not to be overheard, "have you come to see mademoiselle?"

"Has she returned?" I cried. Suddenly I realized by a glance at the servant's anxious face that her question was a pious fiction. Camille had not returned. My exclamation revealed to my questioner the fact that I knew something, and she at once began to interrogate me. Her questions served to inform me.

"Listen, M. La Croix," she said anxiously, as she clasped her rough and misshapen servant's hands which trembled a little. "If you know where she is, I ask you in the name of your mother, go and find her. Since the coachman brought a message from her last evening that she would not return, madam has been mad with grief. I never saw her like it before, not even when we found her

husband with a bullet in his forehead. She does nothing but weep and say to me : " I don't want ever to see her again. I will turn her out if she comes back." She says that ; but if Camille returns I am sure she will forgive her. Do you understand that, M. La Croix ? A child like her, modest and sweet, who never allowed any one to approach her ! We used to say, madam and I, that she would marry so well, like that singer who became a marquise ! No, I cannot believe that she has gone astray ! M. La Croix, you who are so good, tell me what you know. I am not like some people. I have brought her up since she was little, and it was on her account that I did not leave madam when the crash came. But don't let the porter see me talking to you for so long. I have already had some difficulty in explaining why Camille did not come home last night."

" Alas ! " I replied without obeying her request to go upstairs, for I feared the mother's grief too much, " I know nothing more than you do, and the proof of that is that I came to inquire after Mademoiselle Favier, who appeared to me to be unwell last evening.

" She is not at your rooms, is she ? " the woman asked struck by my embarrassment. Her suspicion revealed to me what passionate affection she bore the little one, as she called Camille. The mother's despair and the servant's distraction completed the breaking of my heart. Once more I realized in what an atmosphere of naïve and simple tenderness the poor Blue Duchess had grown up.

She had been one of those little girls whose coming into the world is treated as a festival, and the steps towards their womanhood are festivals too: baptism, birthdays, her first sacrament, and her first long dress—and all that for the object of so much moving solicitude to end in the defilement of gallantry! The faithful servant continued like a naïve echo of my own bitter thoughts: "No, she cannot be with you or M. Molan, nor with M. Fomberteau; you are all of you too good fellows to turn a girl like her into a kept woman. She will be that now, Camille, Camille, Camille!"

Forgetting her own precautions to prevent the gossip of the porter, the good woman began to sob. I calmed her to the best of my ability by swearing to her that I would make every effort to see Camille during the day and to tell her the state into which her mother had been thrown by her departure.

"Make her come back!" was the only answer I obtained through her tears coupled with this sublime expression of shameless devotion: "If she wants to have adventures I will help her as much as she likes. Tell her so, only let her remain and live with us!"

The struggle then was over. The drama of passion and perfidy at which I had assisted for the last few weeks had reached its logical conclusion. My dream had lied to me. It was too late to prevent that adorable child, born with the most rare and delicate romance in her heart and head, becoming nothing more than a courtesan. Her pride itself, that pretty, vibrating pride for which I had

loved her so, would hate her degradation. When she emerged from the furious crisis which had sent her to the bed of a man like Tournade, the contempt she would feel for herself would vilify her so in her own eyes and her inner nausea would have two results equally frightful to imagine : either she would not bear her life a day longer and kill herself, or else she would take a sorrowing pride in incarnating in herself that outrageous type of luxury and triumphant shamelessness which become a great actress who is also a great courtesan. Which of these two solutions should a man prefer who loved her as I did, first of all with a somewhat obscure sentiment, but now with one which was very full of misery and suffering ? Both perspectives seemed so horrible to me that in spite of the promise I had given the old servant I made a fixed resolution never to see the unhappy child again, and a wiser one still of putting into execution a plan I had long pondered over, ever since, in fact, I had begun to understand my poor heart : to go away, and return either to Spain or Italy, to one of those sunny lands where a soul wounded to death can at least wrap up its wound in solitude, light and beauty.

I ordered my astonished servant to pack up at once for a long absence, and I set to work to classify studies and then run through guide books, compelling myself to become absorbed in the hustle of this unexpected departure. This new and monstrous fact, the fall of Camille into Tournade's arms, had suspended every other thought in my

mind. I had forgotten Madam de Bonnivet, the scene of the previous evening, and Molan himself. It was therefore like a sudden displacement of the atmosphere, a recall to an abolished reality, when I saw the latter about half-past two enter the studio. It was Molan, however, who was the cause of the moral shipwreck from which I was suffering. He was the man I ought to curse and hate. I perceived him, simply recognizing his face, hearing his voice and touching his hand. He wore his evil expression, that of his periods of ferocious hardness, and his supreme excitement was betrayed at least to any one of experience like myself, by a way he had of biting his lower lip with his teeth, thus imperceptibly lengthening his already somewhat lengthy profile, and the animal hidden in every one of us—which in his case was the fox—was so cruelly in evidence that even the friend most hypnotized by affection could see at those times his real character. For my own part I experienced, on discovering in his face the traces of his real nature, a start of antipathy which inundated me with rancour. All my sufferings of the last few hours exploded and I received him with a torrent of abuse.

"You have come to tell me, have you not, you who have behaved so badly, that poor Camille is utterly lost now? I went to her house this morning, and I learned that she had spent the night from home. We know where. That is the work of your egoism. But there will be a reckoning with you for this infamy; there is justice somewhere.

It is a crime, do you hear, a crime to play with a sincere heart and to behave as you have done."

"Let me alone," he quickly interrupted with a shrug of the shoulders. "When a young girl takes a lover, she will take two, three, four, and the rest. If Camille had been an honourable creature she would have said to me when I courted her: 'Will you marry me? No? Then good-bye.' She did not say so. So much the worse for her! Besides, if I did her a wrong, it seems to me that now we are quits, mean trick for mean trick, her scene of last evening was equal to all my infamy!"

"Ah! the scene from *Adrienne!*" I cried. "Are you thinking of that to try and quiet your remorse instead of shedding every tear in your body over the moral assassination you have committed. Let us talk of that evening! What painful consequences can it have which you can put in the scale to counterbalance a ruined future and a poor soul defiled forever? Has Bonnivet turned his wife out? Has he sent his seconds to you? No, I answer myself, and I will save you the trouble of comparing the bad five minutes you passed and deserved with the vertigo which has just seized and destroyed this poor girl for the whole of her life; I repeat, and you shall hear, for the whole of her life."

"What heat!" he replied with an ironical smile. "What eloquence! We are engaged in telling the beautiful truth. Come, you are angry with yourself for not having the courage to put yourself forward in Tournade's place. That is the truth,

no denials, please. I know the cause of it, poor La Croix. Hard words are useless between us, you know that, so let us change our subject of conversation, shall we ? " Then after a short silence he continued : " I am not annoyed with you, and I am going to prove it by asking you to do me a service. Guess whence I have just come ? "

" From the house of that hussy, Madam de Bonnivet, naturally," I replied. I was quite determined to end the interview with a quarrel, and I had used the phrase which I thought most likely to bring that about quickly. My anger changed into stupor at hearing him reply to me with a chuckle—

" Yes, with that hussy, Madam de Bonnivet. You hate her very much, do you not ? You think I am very infamous to sacrifice Camille for her, don't you ? Ah, well ! " he went on in a singularly bitter tone which made me realize that something very new and unexpected had taken place in that quarter, " I have come to ask you to aid me in my revenge. That surprises you, does it not ? "

" Confess that there is a reason," I answered him. " I left you at eleven o'clock last evening, only thinking of her and indignant with Camille on her account. Then you treated as a dirty trick the foolish prank of that poor child because she—— "

" I repeat the expression," he very quickly interrupted me. Another period of silence followed. I could see that a combat between most contradictory sentiments was taking place in him. What he had to tell me wounded his vanity sorely.

On the other hand the same vanity desired to wreak upon Madam de Bonnivet the immediate vengeance of which he had spoken, and I alone was able to help him effectively. But this man, who was usually master of himself, had just been so completely overwhelmed by an affront, which was all the harder for him to bear as he was unprepared for it. His anger was very great, and he went on in a hissing voice which vibrated with absolute sincerity: "Yes, a dirty trick. I stand by the expression, and I am almost happy to have to do so, for it constitutes a hold over her. Listen," he went on, putting his hand on my arm, and pressing it as he spoke. "I called upon Madam de Bonnivet directly after lunch to-day. I was uneasy. It is in vain that we know that women are like cats, and always fall on their feet, keeping something in their disposition with which to twist a husband who loves them round their fingers when and as often as they please—do you understand me?—we have to be so very careful! I was afraid that Bonnivet had made a scene with his wife after Camille's escapade last evening. Now you will admire my foolishness and cease to reproach me with heartlessness. For once I obeyed my poor heart and it was a success! So I called upon her and was received in the small drawing-room, which you know, by the woman, reclining in a long chair, clad in a thin dressing-gown. You can imagine that clad in lace, with just enough light to give her a shadowy charm like a phantom, she looked like a picture of the ideal capable of bewitch-

ing a lover who is about to be dismissed. Listen : ' Have you a headache ? ' I asked her. ' I ought to have one at least,' she replied, looking at me with eyes I cannot describe—eyes in which there was hatred and fury ; but at the same time they were cold and venomous eyes. ' You have the audacity,' she continued, ' to return here after what took place yesterday.' I was so dumbfounded by this reception that I had no answer ready. She was making me responsible for the insult Camille had levelled at her ! "

" It is a little severe," I said, laughing in spite of myself at this prodigious change of front, and the sheepish look of the pseudo Don Juan before this surprising display of feminine malice. " Between ourselves you well earned it."

" But listen," he went on more violently than ever, " you will chaff me presently, and you will be right. I thought I had touched this icy soul in a spot with some feeling in it. I was taken in, that is all. You cannot imagine what hard, cruel things she said to me in that quarter of an hour ; and though I very well knew to what risk I was exposing myself by allowing Camille to act there, yet I had naturally felt flattered at having my two mistresses face to face, and at being received there myself as a man of the world and Camille as a lady ; and though I had conducted myself as a man of letters while she behaved like a common actress, yet she dared to make use of words which indicated that it was a scheme devised between us to satisfy my vanity and to revenge the insolence

she had suffered, that it was the last time her door would be opened to me, and that she had spoken to her husband—she dared to tell me that—yes, that she had spoken to him and explained to him this girl's ignoble conduct by a boast on my part! But if you had heard her tone of voice when she insisted: 'My first vengeance shall be, since it appears she loves you, to send you back to her, and she shall see you unhappy, and unhappy through me; for you shall be, you shall be!' She laughed her bitter laugh, which you know, and I, the Jacques Molan you know, listened, so terrified at the baseness of soul which these phrases proved, that I did not stop her. I might say if I posed to you that I amused myself by studying it. Alas, no! at that moment I was paralysed, I do not really understand by what. But I was. Can you imagine Pierre de Bonnivet entering in the midst of this scene, and the silence which fell upon the three of us in that little drawing-room? I swear to you I thought of crying out to that fool of a husband then: 'You know I have been your wife's lover.' I believe that would have soothed me! What would have followed? A duel. I should have survived it, and I should have been revenged through this woman's dishonour. But the prejudice which requires a man to bear everything rather than to betray a woman who has given herself to him, even when she deserves it, stopped me. And so, here I am."

"But what motive has she obeyed?" I cried, so astounded by the story that it did not occur to

me to laugh at the contrast between Jacques' triumphant attitude of the previous evening and the piteous confession he had just made in a hesitating though furious way, being so overwhelmed that he had told me everything haphazard, this time without calculation and without posing. It was the shriek of the wounded animal. "Yes," I repeated, "what is her motive? She has been your mistress. Consequently she must have thought something of you!"

"Her object was to take me from Camille," he interrupted. "That I have always known. Now that she has succeeded I no longer interest her, which is quite natural. The spite of outraged self-conceit has done the rest. For a few minutes I represented Camille to her and she detested me with the hatred she bears her. That is also very natural. She has found a means of satisfying everything at once: her caution concerning her husband's suspicions, which were now very much aroused; her ferocious hate, and without doubt her natural fund of brutality by that unlikely rupture. But I am not turned out just like that. I have a revenge to take, and I will take it. You will aid me, and at once."

"I?" I replied; "how?"

"By going at once to Camille," he told me, and as I made a gesture he insisted: "Yes, to Camille. There is a first night at the Theatre Français for which I have a box. I wish to attend the performance with her *tête-à-tête*, do you understand? Madam de Bonnivet will be there. I want the

wretch to see me with little Favier, and I want her to realize that we are reconciled and happy, for that will wound her self-conceit. It is the only place where I can attack her. Ah! she is convinced that I left her house in tears with my heart torn, and that I am miserable! She will have before her fine guinea fowl eyes the proof that she will no longer be of any more account in our lives, Camille's and mine, than that," and he threw down a match with which he had just lit his cigarette; "and she will have to say to herself: 'All the same, this man has had me.' For I have had her; she cannot alter the fact that she has been my mistress. What a revenge it is even to think that a woman can never efface that!"

This horrible explosion of evil sentiments had made the face of Jacques, who not without reason passed as a handsome man, and who could make himself so feline, so gentle, and so caressing, quite sinister. He was hideous at this moment when he was justifying in a striking way the theories of poor Claude upon the savage hatred which is at the root of sexual intercourse. This so-called love, which has cruelty for its root, has always been so repulsive to me that it was impossible for me to pity Jacques, although I felt that he was as unhappy as it was possible for him to be. Besides, I could clearly see the absolute uselessness of the mission which the discarded lover wished me to undertake. Madam de Bonnivet's character became quite clear to me. I realized that even with his subtle pretensions to trickery my companion

had been in the hands of this woman what the most corrupt of writers would always be in the hands of a really wicked creature who did not dally with depravity. A child, a poor, little swaggering imp of vice immediately unmasked and bound.

This implacable coquette had amused herself by destroying little Favier's happiness with the joy those beings who cannot feel experience in torturing the sentiments of others! She had seen clearly into Molan's heart. She had manœuvred so as to bury the knife in the vulnerable part and at the desired moment. She turned him out, after that had been done, with the only pleasure she could feel—that of causing suffering. He, the theorist of all Parisian depravities, had allowed himself to be cornered at this little execution without any suspicion. Now he was foaming at the mouth with impotent rage against the mistress who had played with him as long as this sport had suited her despotism, her ennui, and her moral depravity. But she had not left in his hands a line of her writing, a portrait—nothing in fact which could bear witness to their liaison. No. Molan was no match for her, and had I not been influenced by other motives I should have refused to undertake the commission he desired. The only service to render him was to take him away from any intercourse with this terrible woman. Besides, again making use of the unfortunate actress in this affair would have appeared to me the misery of miseries, and I told him so. "Be satisfied," I said, "with

this revenge, for when you speak of the other you forget what your relations with Camille are."

"How?" he said, and he made use of the most astounding expression his egoism had ever uttered in my presence: "Since I forgive her that night with Tournade!"

"But," I replied, "perhaps she does not forgive you."

"Now," he said, "you have only to go and ask her to give me a ten minutes' interview here. You will see if she will refuse. Do it for me and for her!"

"No, no," I gave as my final reply with the brutality of real indignation, which made him shrug his shoulders and pick up his hat as he said—

"Very well, I will go and find her myself."

"Where?" I asked.

"Where she is," he answered.

"At Tournade's house?"

"Yes. After all an encounter with that funny fellow would rest my nerves. Then the Bonnivet woman will hear of it, and it will be another proof that I still love Camille. But I shall find a letter from her at home waiting, asking me to see her. It is surprising that she has not reappeared this morning."

He had again become the Jacques Molan of his best days, the man of such assurance, of such imperturbable personal affirmation, from which a curious authority emanated. Henceforward I was refractory on my own account. Was it the same with Camille? Would he not succeed in

recovering his influence over the poor mistress he had tormented and vilified? Then what worse degradation would she have to suffer? That question which I asked myself when Jacques had at last gone so overhelmed me with bitterness that my desire to go away, to see neither him nor her and to know no more about them, became irresistible. I decided to start for Marseilles that same evening. There I would decide upon my destination. I spent the rest of the day in making the necessary arrangements and visiting a few relatives. From time to time I looked at my watch, and at the thought that the time of departure was approaching a hand seemed to clutch my heart. I felt beforehand the chill of the solitude which I was about to enter in leaving the city in which my only love lived and breathed. How great was my discomfiture when at six o'clock, just as I was sitting down to dinner, I heard a carriage stop. The bell rang and then I heard a voice, that of the person I most desired and at the same time most feared to see, the voice of Camille Favier!

"Are you going away?" she asked me when I went to her in the studio, where I had told the servant to take her. "I saw your trunks in the anteroom."

"Yes," I said, "I am going for a tour in Italy." She had not raised her veil, as if she did not wish me to see her face. This sign of the shame which she felt was very pleasant to me. It was a proof, after so many others, of her natural delicacy, which

made her lapse into prostitution all the more heart-breaking to me, and which made her more sadly, though madly, dear to me.

"When?" she again asked me.

"In an hour and twenty-five minutes if the train is not late," I said in a joking tone looking at the clock, the sound of whose ticking filled the empty room. For a time we remained silently listening to this noise of time, the unalterable step of life which had led us to that moment which would lead us on to other moments, moments we foresaw likely to be dishonourable for her and melancholy for me. Although we had only exchanged those insignificant words, she saw that I knew everything. She sat down, leant her forehead on her hands, and went on—

"So much the worse. I wanted you to take a message for me to Jacques."

"What?" I said tremblingly; I anticipated the horrible confidence. But I added: "If I can be of service to you by postponing my departure——"

"No," she said with strange energy. "It is not worth the trouble. It is better that I should never see you again. It was to return him this letter he sent me to-day—see to what address," and she held out the envelope on which I could see the name of Tournade and the Rue Lincoln; she added in a voice which was less firm: "I wished to ask him not to write to me nor seek for me again, either there or elsewhere, as I am no longer free."

Then followed another period of silence, after which she got up and offered me her hand, saying—

"I will send him back the letter myself through the post. It will be better. Now, Vincent, good-bye, and a pleasant trip. You will remember me, will you not, and not judge me too harshly. Come, give me a kiss, as we shall not see one another again till God knows when!"

As I pressed my lips upon her cheek I felt through her veil that it was moist with tears. Not another word was spoken between us. I could not find a question to ask her. She did not think of a plaint to make. Even at the deathbeds of those I loved most I have never said a good-bye which has cost me more.

CHAPTER XI

YES, it was a sad and rending farewell! I must, too, have been plunged into the depths of melancholy in my heart, for as I wrote the account of it I sprinkled the paper with my tears; and now I feel that I have hardly the strength to take up my pen again to add to this real romance the sinister epilogue, the suggestive irony of which alone decided me to write these pages. Twenty-five months and an absence of that length have not healed my secret wound. It is still open and bleeding at the recollection simply of Camille's cheek moist with those vain tears beneath my farewell kiss, the first and last I ever placed on that charming face which was now profaned for ever. Yet if absence and silence are the two great remedies for those passions without hope and desire, one of which my strange sentiment for this poor girl was, I can do myself the justice to say that I sincerely practised them. Those twenty-five months appeared to me so short, so short when compared with those few weeks spent in following hour by hour the fatal march of the deceived mistress towards despair, and the rest without trying to prevent it.

But let us run through those two years from memory, and also to prove that I have not much to regret in their employment. First of all, that same evening came my hurried flight to Marseilles, then the following day I sailed for Tuscany by one of the boats which call at Bastia eighteen hours later and then at Leghorn. I have always preferred this way of entering dear Italy without halts by the way, besides which this journey did away with the possibility of telegrams or letters for at least half a week, from Sunday to Thursday. Would Camille Favier leave Tournade and resume her position as Jacques' mistress or not? Would the latter follow up his absurd project of a duel with his new rival? Would he not extend the folly of his humiliated self-conceit to the length of having an affair with Pierre de Bonnivet as well? So weary was I that I no longer wished to set myself these problems. O God, how weary I was! In parenthesis, I was very wrong in setting myself these problems, for to talk like my friend Claude, who used to quote with such delight a phrase from Beyle upon the execution of one of his heroes: "Everything went off simply and decently."

I found out that detail afterwards, but much later. At the time I remained in an uncertainty which I had the wisdom to prolong. But four months later, opening by chance a French paper in a hotel in Perugia, I saw that Mademoiselle Camille Favier was to replace Mademoiselle Berthe Vigneau in the chief part of a comedy by Dorsenné;

that Molan was publishing a collection of his own plays ; that a horse of M. Tournade's, Butterfly, had won some big race ; that at a very select gathering at M. de Senneterre's Madam X——, Madam Y——, Madam Z——, and Madam de Bonnivet were noticed. All this news was packed into this one issue of the paper like raisins in a pudding. It sufficed to prove to me that this corner of the world, like all corners of the world, was still itself, and that there was a reassuring lack of important events. But on my part, was I not imitating myself by copying first a part of the fresco of Spinello Aretino on Saint Ephèse, then the Salomé of Fra Filippo Lippo at Prato, and going on with a study after the Piero della Francesca by Arezzo ? Then I was preparing to go to Ancona ; afterwards to Brindisi ; to visit Athens and Olympia, to feast with new visions the most sterile and insatiable of dilettantisms. When I think of that furious work of vain culture, I repeat to myself another phrase which Dorsenné was always quoting, the exclamation of the dying Bolivar so poignant with lassitude : " Those who have served the Revolution have ploughed the sea ! " Have those who have served art as I have served it accomplished more useful work ? Then what is it ?

Then what ? I think that Bonaparte, Talleyrand, Bernadotte and many others would have smiled a smile of the most profound contempt for the dying revolutionary who had caught no treasure in the great troubled sea of politics, and I have only to think of the two little scenes which fixed

the bitter crisis in my memory to smile a no less contemptuous smile at myself. However, after my tour in Greece, I returned to prepare for a longer stay in the Orient, and a visit to Egypt and Asia Minor in the month of October, to begin there that series of pictures upon our Lord, conceived in their natural environment, which would have been the definitive work of my maturity if another had not anticipated me.

Chance had prevented me meeting Jacques and Camille between these two trips. I only know that the latter was more celebrated than ever and the former had married. He had decided at last to pluck the ripe pear, and he had done so under the wisest conditions. He had married a widow of about his own age who was very rich and without children, with sufficient to provide him in his maturity with a luxurious home without the aid of his copy. But as he had not deigned to add a friendly word to the wedding card he sent me I had not written to him. That absolute suppression of intercourse between us hardly allowed me to expect to see him enter, as he did the other day, my studio, looking a little older, but with as clear an eye, as satirical a mouth, and as well-dressed and smart a person as ever. Had we met on the previous evening he could not have shaken hands with gayer cordiality, and at once without waiting to hear my news began—

"You don't know the pleasure I feel in seeing you again. When will you come and dine and be presented to Madam Molan? You shall see that

I have been lucky in the marriage lottery. I am sure you will be very pleased with her. She knows, too, how I like you. Yes, we have not met lately, but that is no reason for forgetting. What have you been doing since we had our last chat? It is two years ago; how time passes! I knew that you had gone to the Orient. I heard of you through Laurens, the Consul at Cairo. You see, I followed your movements from afar. But tell me," he went on, after I had replied to him in some embarrassment. These subtle cordialities after such indifference still disconcerted me a little. "Yes, tell me. Have you seen Camille Favier?"

"Me?" I cried, and I felt that I was blushing under his indulgent, ironical look, "never. Why do you ask that?"

"Ah, my dear boy," he said laughing, and this time with a gay laugh which displayed his white teeth, which had remained quite sound though he was forty, "you were born simple and simple you will remain."

"I understand you less and less," I replied somewhat impatiently.

"Why? She pleased you. You pleased her. She has had lover after lover since Tournade—Philippe de Vardes, Machault, Roland de Brèves—every one, in fact, ending by the little Duke of Lautrec, who spends 200,000 francs a year on her, and yet you did not return! It is said," he continued with more malice still in his eyes, "that you will never see her again except under my chaperonage! Do you recall our last conversa-

tion, how I asked you to act as my ambassador to her and you refused ? Ah, well, I want you to undertake another mission to her. Are you going to refuse again ? "

" That depends upon the mission," I replied in the same jesting tone.

" Alas ! it is quite a literary one, " he went on gaily. " It is not that I fear my wife's jealousy. We are not lovers, she and I. We are associates for life, and she is intelligent enough to understand that the infidelities of a man like myself are of no consequence. But I have in all things a horror of going back, and particularly in love ! Briefly this is what it is. You remember Madam de Bonnivet and her jealousy of Camillle ? "

" Queen Anne ! " I interrupted ; " do you want to send me to her too ? That would crown everything."

" No ! " he said, " that is all over, and a very good thing, too. Do you know that she has been left a widow. There is a report that she is going to get married again. But the whole story, Camille's jealousy, the scene at my rooms, and the scene in the drawing-room, were all so well suited to a play that I have written one. It is a kind of *Adrienne Lecouvreur,* but modern. I have read it to a few friends and they are all of the same opinion, that it is the best thing I have done. We shall see whether his accession of wealth has spoiled Jacques Molan. It is a fact that I swore to write no more, and this is the only exception I shall make to that rule. After the age of forty, however

great a genius a man may be, he repeats himself, then he has outlived his day. When a man cannot surpass himself it is better for him to be silent. I dream of an end like Shakespeare and Rossini, the end of a very little Rossini and an even smaller Shakespeare. But I have done what I can and I wish to let my twenty volumes rest. But this opportunity was too strong for me. The subject took possession of me, and the play is written. I repeat it is the last!"

"You have written a play upon that story?" I interrupted. "What will Madam de Bonnivet say?"

"That I am not clever," he said. "With women of the world it is very simple. You figure in their drawing-rooms and you are a great man. You no longer appear there and your plays are not worth seeing. My wife has already recognized three of our friends as the principal character in the play. Besides people like the Bonnivets are very common now and they will not be recognized in it.

"But Camille, whose romance, a sad and true romance, this adventure was, have you not thought of what you were doing to her by transporting her adventure warm with life to the stage?"

"That is precisely it," he replied nodding his head; "it is her life and her personality. She is the only one who can play the part, and I do not know how to negotiate with her. She is a strange creature. She never forgets. Would you believe

that three weeks ago she spoke bitterly of me to one of our mutual friends! If I write to her she is quite capable of leaving my letter unopened. Some one must go and suggest the part to her, some one before whom she has no self-conceit. I thought of Fomberteau. But we have not been very friendly since my marriage. He reproached me with selling myself. What foolishness! Camille and he have quarrelled, too, over some article. Oh, she has become a great actress now. That is the reason I have come to you to ask for your assistance."

"Me!" I cried. "You want me to go with your manuscript and beg that poor girl not only to forgive you for writing the play, but also on your behalf to take the part herself! Come, let me look you straight in the face! But you are not a fool You are a man like another. Yet you do not realize what a monstrous thing you are proposing to me!"

"Ah, well!" he replied with his usual smile, which he had already employed to laugh at my *naïveté*, "will you undertake simply to convey our conversation to her as far as your indignant exit just now? I authorize you to do so. That does not make you into the accomplice of any infamy. You are going to see an old friend you have somewhat neglected. Nothing can be more natural, can it? You talk of the rain and the fine weather. My name is mentioned and you repeat our conversation exactly, beginning like this: What do you think Jacques dared to ask

me ? You will then see what answer she will give."

Was it the continuation of the habitual empire his vitality had exercised from our college days over my doubts ? Was there concealed within me a secret desire to see Camille again, a curiosity to know what the Blue Duchess of two years ago had become ? Did I also feel curious to know her reply to Jacques' outrageous proposal ? But whatever the reason, I accepted this mission which I considered and still consider monstrous. I called upon Camille, everybody's Camille, to take her the horrible words of her old lover. I saw once more the face I loved so well, but now it was framed in ignoble luxury which contrasted so cruelly to my mind with the proud and humble simplicity of the Rue de la Barouillère ! Not one of those pieces of furniture in those former apartments in that old street but told of a noble act of her who did not wish to sell her beauty, or of her mother who had saved the honour of their name by the heroic sacrifice of her fortune. There was not a room in the sumptuous house, that home of infamy where she lived now in the Avenue de Villiers, like my fashionable colleagues, which did not tell of one of her prostitutions.

Was it indeed the woman who, when I last saw her, had not dared to raise her veil, as if she were afraid I should see the traces on her pale cheeks of Tournade's caresses ? Yes, it was the same woman who now received me laughing in insolent bravado with not a trace of embarrassment ; and

she was still beautiful, adorably beautiful, with her fine and delicate beauty, which I believe would never have deserted her whatever her surroundings; but she was now so provoking, so shameless!

Not a word, not a blush, not a falter betrayed that she felt any emotion at seeing in me the witness of what must remain to her a perpetual memory. She lit, while she listened to me, an Egyptian cigarette of tobacco the colour of her hair, and smoked it, exhaling the bluish smoke through her delicate nostrils, with wide open eyes between her eyelashes which had been slightly eaten away by the crayon she used. Her mouth looked too red from the rouge of the night before; her cheeks were fuller and her throat was larger; and her more opulent lips were defined by a dressing-gown which was a costume of blue stuff worked and embroidered with silver. I began as a matter of politeness by giving her a brief account of my travels, my work and my return; then I broached the real object of my visit, and I conveyed to her brutally, without evasion, Molan's proposal.

"Is he cad enough!" she said shrugging her supple shoulders. "Is he cad enough!" For a moment I hoped that a nausea of disgust would prove to me that the old Camille was not dead. But no, she went on after a brief silence: "If there is really a fine part for me, tell him to send or bring me the play. He is so very clever when he is clever! Have you read the play? Is he satisfied with it? You know I am really in need of a fine part. So is he, for since he has become wealthy,

he is allowing himself to be forgotten. Between the two of us I will answer for its success : his prose is so tender and I interpret it so well ! "

Not a vestige of indignation did she feel, that indignation I had felt at knowing that the sorrowful romance of her irreparable downfall was profaned ! Hardly a vestige of malice did she show against Jacques, that malice he himself expected ! From her clear eyes which retained the colour, the transparent purity, of the days of her innocence, I now saw her smile at the fine part, as I had seen Jacques smile on the subject of the play. Then it was I really understood the reason I should never be a great artist. For them—for him as I have always known him, for her as she has become after her first experience, their entire life, hearts included, is only an opportunity for producing the special act they have to produce, the precious secretion which they make, as the bee does honey, as the spider does its web, by an instinct blind and ferocious as all instincts are.

Love, hate, joy and sorrow is the soil to make the flower of their talent grow, this flower of delicacy and of passion, for which they do not hesitate a moment to kill in themselves all real delicacy and living passion. For a word to speak on the stage, for a phrase to write in a book, this woman and this man would sell their father and their mother—Camille had not even mentioned hers ; they would sell their friend, their child, and their sweetest memory. I, who have spent my life in feeling what they express so well, he in black

and white, she by gestures and in moving accents, only succeed in paralysing myself with that which exalts these expressive natures; in exhausting myself with that which nourishes these souls of prey. Does destiny then will it that artists, little or great, be of necessity distributed between the two classes, those who transcribe marvellously without feeling the passions which the other class feels without power to transcribe? Was Jacques right in saying that his cruelty to Camille by giving her memories would also give her talent? A fine part! A good play! Really we do not complain at remaining obscure and mediocre, if this obscurity and mediocrity are the condition for real feeling. Besides we have no choice.

THE END.

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